

THE CHOICE OF A MASTER

"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:15.

These words were spoken amid circumstances of great solemnity. Joshua was an old man. His life as a chieftain and a statesman was about to end. He was delivering his farewell address to the people whom he had led so long and whom he had loved so well. He gave them his last counsel, which was the matured experience of his many years. Now we all know what importance we attach to the last words of any one -- to the last words of great and good men -- to the last words of our dearest friends and nearest relatives. And we are quite right in doing so; such words are usually earnest and solemn words, spoken from the deepest depths of one's heart.

Joshua knew that the people who surrounded him, while ostensibly serving Jehovah, were many of them secretly worshipping the ancient idols of their Mesopotamian fathers. Some of them also harbored the Egyptian emblems, and some of them had even fallen into the worship of the gods of the people whom they had displaced, and they were setting up the images of Baalim in their habitations. The people were nominally worshippers of Jehovah, but in reality many of them were worshipping strange gods. Joshua could not endure double-mindedness; therefore, he challenged the people to decision, urging them to serve the Lord with sincerity, and, if they did so, to put away altogether all their graven images. He shut them up to a present choice, between the true God and idols, and gave them no rest in their half-heartedness. He realized the perils in which they were situated and understood clearly that their only safety consisted in abstaining from the heathenism which was pressing them on every hand, and in constant loyalty to Jehovah. These words were uttered with something of the tenderness of a father and something of the majesty of a king. In fact, they are the loving words of a loving God, finding expression in a supreme moment.

Joshua began by telling them how God called Abraham, their forefather, on the other side of the river and promised him the land of Canaan, where they now dwelt. Then, how, after a while, Jacob and his family went down into Egypt, and were oppressed. Then, how God sent his servant Moses and delivered His people, and slew the Egyptians at the Red Sea with a mighty slaughter. Then, how God preserved them in the wilderness and would not let Balak, the sorcerer, curse them. Then, how at last, they took Jericho and drove out the old heathen Canaanites. And, lastly, he reminded them of the Promised Land, where they now dwelt, and which God has given to them and to their children. He reminded them of God's mercies to them since they had become a nation, and bade them remember these mercies, and serve the Lord their God. He urged them to have nothing to do with heathen idols, for God would have none of their half-service -- worshipping Him with their lips and hankering after the idols of the heathen with their hearts.

After rehearsing the Lord's dealings with His people, he also rehearsed the people's dealings with the Lord. He recalled their murmurings, their reluctant service, their dubious homage, their uncertain attachment, and their frequent revolts. He called to their mind God's guidance in the past, reviewed the promises of their future success, and explaining the conditions on which their prosperity depended. He called upon them to choose now, this day, whom they will serve -- the God of their fathers, and enjoy prosperity and peace, or the idols of the heathen, and incur ruin and death.

Joshua's words, "choose you this day whom you will serve," may very well be spoken to us in these days. For, if God was gracious to them, has He not been much more gracious to us? Truly we have been blessed of God far beyond what we deserve. God has been more gracious to us than ever He was to Israel of old. Therefore, we must not abuse God's blessings.

To assist them in making the right decision, Joshua declared his own. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Personal example is eloquent beyond the power of words. Hear the grand old crusader as he implies. "You may hesitate, but my mind is made up once for all. Judge as you will, but my verdict is already given, and my children agree therein. As for me and my house, we do not have any reverence for the demons of Canaan or the myths of Egypt, who could not preserve their own worshippers, but we will serve the Lord." He might have added, "If my house will not, still, as for me, I will. I will serve God and live for Him. His law shall be my rule, and His work shall be my joy." This clear avowal on the part of Joshua was not a trick of eloquence or a resolve made for the first time in order to influence his audience. He had so lived that his avowal carried weight with all who heard it, for Joshua had always been a man of firm step and determined mind. His decision implied that all hesitation was gone. Also, that his state of heart was superior to the evil influence of others. His decision was solemnly made, openly avowed, and earnestly adhered to throughout the whole of his life.

I. The Reality Of This Choice.

Choosing means taking one course rather than another. It is not taking both, or neither, or a little of each, or first one and then the other, It is choosing one path and leaving all others.

1. Every person has a master.

Joshua does not ask the Israelites if they will have a master. He does not ask them whether or not they will serve any god. He recognizes the fact that it is a part of man's nature to fear and serve some Superior Power or Being. If men will not serve the true and living God, they will be the slaves of something. Some kind of service is inevitable. Man cannot be absolutely free and independent. There is something to which he pays supreme homage, and it is either to the great and living God or to the idols of his own self-will or of the vain world around him.

2. Every person chooses his own master.

It is the glory of our nature that we can make such a choice. God has so constituted us that this self-determining power is one of our most essential prerogatives. A man's god is his individual choice. This choice is a matter of liberty, and not of compulsion. The freedom of the will is seen in the power of choice. Choose man must; but he can choose what seems best to him. The service of God is a matter of free personal choice. The simple alternative they were called on to decide was either the service of the Lord Jehovah, or the service of the false gods of Egypt and of the Amorites. No middle course was open to them. There could be no compromise. It had to be the one or the other. But, they had the privilege of determining which it should be.

3. Every person has only two masters to choose between.

God will not accept any divided allegiance. He will have from us all or nothing in the way of service. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "No man can serve two masters. Matt. 6:24. The alternative for us, in the matter of service, is between Satan and the Saviour. Our choice lies between these two only. Servants to the one or the other we must be. "Know ye not, that to whomever ye yield yourselves, his servants ye are. Romans 6:16. Yielding to Satan makes us the servants of Satan. Yielding to God makes us the servants of God. In order to get us to make the right choice God does not use coercion or compulsion. Everyone is at liberty to decline God's service just the same as he is to enter it; but to refuse is to choose. Not to serve Christ is to serve Satan. Between the service of God and the service of sin, men are obliged to choose. The service of God is exclusive. It does not admit of interference, or of competition, or of divided homage. It must have the whole man. The choice of one thing is the refusal of its opposite. To choose the services of sin is to refuse to serve God, and vice versa.

II. The Responsibility for This Choice.

The privilege of choice is a great and blessed privilege. You may say that it is often abused. Yes; but still it is well that the privilege exists. It is well that men are not controlled by an irresistible fate.

1. Every person is responsible for the choice made.

The responsibility of choice is thrown on you, and you cannot throw it off. The Bible is full of the recognition of the responsibility of each man for his choice. Man as a moral agent is free --- free to think, free to choose, and free to act. The power of choice implies free will and therefore responsibility. The entire responsibility of choosing rests on each individual.

2. Every person is responsible for making the right choice.

In view of God's character, goodness, mercy, love and many blessings all should make His service their deliberate and irrevocable choice. Each individual should make a choice that is:

- (1) Divine in its object.
We should choose the Lord for our God.
- (2) Rational in its character.
We should wisely consider what we are doing.
- (3) Decisive in its nature.
- (4) Practical in its operations.

III. The Reasons For An Immediate Choice.

Our text tells us when this choice should be made. It says, "This day." We have similar language elsewhere in the Scriptures. "Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." If the blessings of salvation are important, they should be sought without delay. The choice enjoined in our text should be made at once, for various reasons:

1. It is right.

Justice demands this of us. It is not right to give Satan the major or best portion of one's life. If a man turns to God in old age, God has the man, but He has been defrauded of the man's work. And the man has been defrauded also. This choice is absolutely right, and what is right cannot be done too soon.

2. It is easier made now than it will ever be again.

The longer one delays, the more difficult it is to make the right choice. The difficulty in choosing always increases in proportion to one's neglect of it. The longer a sinner refuses to repent, the less probable his repentance becomes. Sin is added to sin. The heart becomes harder. The longer the delay, the greater is the improbability of conversion and salvation. Indecision is a fatal error.

3. It is conducive to happiness.

Real peace and joy begin with the acceptance of Christ by faith. Genuine happiness results from choosing God. All who have Christ for their personal Saviour are in a state of tranquility and safety. An immediate choice of Christ will save you from many regrets later on. No one has ever been sorry that he or she had become a follower of Christ. But, who is to be the source of all you hope for if you put away the Saviour of Calvary?

4. It is perilous to delay.

You should make this choice now because it will save so much of your life and avoid so many regrets in the future. It is never safe to defer this matter. One's best interests are involved in this choice. Why should you be poorer for another day than you need to be? Why should you be without the best blessing that any one can have for another day? It is not likely that many of you will be laid in your graves within the next year; but, it is certain that some of you will. And because none of us knows which one that will be, we should all obey the command of the text. By refusing to make the choice now, you may be lost forever. What a calamity that would be! It would be disastrous, ruinous, and endless. If you do not embrace the existing opportunity of making this choice, another opportunity may never be afforded. This choice will affect all of your relationships in life. This choice will be made for eternity.

In obeying this exhortation to choice or decision, two things are necessary.

1. Promptness -- Delay is not permissible.
2. Publicity.

If you would be consistent, your choice must be public.
Its publicity will be a safeguard and protection to you.
Its publicity will be for the good of the world.
Its publicity will be for the glory of Christ.