

“Choices, Choices, Choices”

MATTHEW 7

INTRO.

Life demands that we make numerous choices every day. Each morning, I make a choice. I choose to get out of bed. Then, I choose what clothes to wear for the day. I choose what to eat for breakfast etc. Everyday we are confronted with choices that affect our lives as well as others around us. When we drive the automobile we choose whether we will drive at the prescribed speed limit or whether we will take our chances and go over the limit. We choose to listen or not to listen to the advice given to us by our parents, family or friends.

The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility. But remember, all choices have consequences. When we make choices we are really choosing consequences whether we are aware of it at the time or not. You remember the two criminals on either side of Jesus? One chose Jesus the other cursed Jesus! The consequences? The one who chose Jesus went to Paradise, the other did not. Choices and consequences – we cannot escape either!

What is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual realm. God created everyone with the power to choose between good and evil. Jesus confronts us with a choice - He invites and we must make a choice to receive or reject Him. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves by our choices.

In Matthew Chapter 7 we are confronted with several choices. This, by the way is the concluding chapter in the Sermon on The Mount. Jesus is summing up His sermon and presenting His audience with eternal choices. Let us look at three of them:

Choice # 1 - Relates to Hypocrites. Matthew 7:1-5

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Here we have the judgmental and the non-judgmental; the truly sincere and the hypocrite. What is a hypocrite? The word for “hypocrite” in the N.T. is the Greek word meaning, “A play actor; one who acts the part to deceive others.” The opposite of “hypocrite” is “sincere.” The word “sincere” comes from two Latin words, “sine” and “cera”, which means “without wax”. In the days of the Roman Empire some sculptors covered their mistakes and the cracks in the ivory statues they carved by filling them with wax. The cracks would not be noticed until the statue was exposed to the heat of the sun and then the wax would melt. But the honest sculptors advertised their products by advertising them as statues “sine cera” – without wax!

It is becoming increasingly common for anyone who professes to be a sincere Christian to be labeled a “hypocrite”. I will grant that there are hypocrites in the church, but the average

person does not know what a hypocrite really is. Before I identify the hypocrites, I will tell you what a hypocrite is not:

- a. A hypocrite is not a Christian who tries and fails. On the contrary, continuous trying after failure is good evidence of sincere Christianity.
- b. A hypocrite is not a weak Christian. Many Christians never grow beyond an immature faith to a mature faith. That is a sad fact but, nevertheless it is true. The church is not a picture gallery of giants but a support community for struggling saints on the straight and narrow road to heaven!

Who is a hypocrite? The dictionary identifies a hypocrite as “One who pretends to be pious without really being so.” (Webster’s New World Dictionary) A hypocrite is an actor. I will illustrate: There is a fable about a war between the fowls and the animals. A bat got entangled in a bush and when the animals rushed upon him he drew in his wings and said, “I am an animal like you” and they ceased their attack. When the birds attacked him he stretched out his wings and said, “I am a bird like you” and they stopped attacking!

We have the choice of being counterfeit or genuine; fake or true; faithless acting like the faithful; a sinner trying to act saintly; hypocritical or humble. It is better to be a confessed sinner than a pretending saint for the sinner can obtain forgiveness from God while the Bible says, God will judge the hypocrite. (Matt. 24:51) Choices! The Choice is up to you!

Choice # 2 - Relates to Highways. **Matthew 7:13-14**

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

These verses give rise to the question: “in which direction do you choose to travel?” Notice three points of emphasis that Jesus makes:

- a. There are two prospects: “destruction” or “life”. Solomon the wise man wrote “The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.” (Prov.15:24) The choice is ours.
- b. There are two paths: The “broad” and the “narrow”. Some say that all people are on the same road, going to the same place. Not so! Jesus said there are two roads and each person must choose which to travel.
- c. There are two portals: “narrow gate” and “wide gate”. Since there is a place called heaven and a place called hell, there must be a way to get there. There is a gate that leads to each place. Ministers in Ireland refer to the two gates as the “wee gate” and the “wide gate”. Jesus said, “I am the door” to the Father’s House, but we must choose to enter or to remain outside.

My uncle died refusing to choose to enter the door Christ Jesus. At the foot of his death bed was a plaque on the wall on which were written these words: “One door and only one

and yet its sides are two: inside and outside, on which side are you?" My Father witnessed to him and pointed to that saying on the wall as I stood by his side. Uncle died outside the door. Choices! The choice is up to you!

Choice # 3 - Relates to Houses. Matthew 7:24-27

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Here again, Jesus confronts His hearers with two propositions. Build your eternal abode on a sound or an unsound foundation – which will it be? Let us analyze this passage as follows:

- a. Two foundations: rock and sand. Will you build on a solid foundation, rock, or a shifting foundation, sand? He says that those who hear His words, believes them and builds upon them is building on a solid foundation. Of course He is referring to Himself as The Rock – the Truth both in His person and in His precepts. (John 14:6; 17:17) He is The Rock (I Cor. 10:4; I Peter 2:8,9).
- b. Two fellows: Wise and foolish. Are you wise? One may be educated at the best of the worlds educational institutions yet be foolish and build upon the wrong foundation. Paul, the Apostle, asked, "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." (I Cor. 1:20-21)
- c. Two futures: The wise endured the storm, the foolish fell. Wind, rain and floods, both literal and figureative, come to all. Following Jesus does not exempt us from life's storms! Jesus is not teaching a parable about how to build our houses in protected areas. There are no storm-free zones! This is a parable about building life upon a foundations just for time or building upon a foundation that lasts for eternity. The house the wise man built on a rock did not fall. The house the foolish man built on sand fell.

CONCLUSION:

Earlier in the Sermon on The Mount Jesus had said, "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24). He is challenging His listeners to choose the right Master. Way back in O.T. history, Joshua said the same thing in different words: "Choose you this day whom you will serve." (Joshua 24:15)

Choice is an individual matter. No human can choose for another when it comes to one's personal salvation.. A belief system is the result of ones choice. Here in the Sermon On The Mount which ends with the story

about dwellings – eternal dwellings – Jesus is saying, “Are you wise? Are you building on a solid foundation? Are you building only for time or are you building for eternity?”

Will we be a hypocrite or genuinely sincere? Will you enter the wide gate and walk the broad way to death or will you enter the small gate and travel the narrow way to life? Are you like the foolish builder or the wise builder? Choices, choices, choices!

In 1174 the Italian architect Bonnano Pisano began work on what would become his most famous project: A bell tower for the Cathedral of the city of Pisa. The tower was to be eight-stories high, 185 feet tall . There was just one "little" problem: builders quickly discovered that the soil was much softer than they had anticipated, and the foundation was far too shallow to adequately hold the structure. And sure enough, before long the whole structure had begun to tilt... and it continued to tilt... until finally the architect and the builders realized that nothing could be done to make the Leaning Tower of Pisa completely straight again.

It took 176 years to build the Tower of Pisa. Many things have been done to try to straighten it. The tower has stood for over 800 years, but it leans 15 feet from the perpendicular. All because it wasn't built on the right foundation and for 800 years, although it is a novelty, it advertises the foolishness of not building on a good foundation. A life built on the wrong foundation may look straight for a while, but eventually the crookedness will show up!

I live in Southern California where we expect and experience earthquakes rather frequently. On Oct. 17, 1989 a massive earthquake struck the San Francisco area. I did not live here at the time but people here are squeamish and now give considerable thought to their foundations. Buildings built on solid ground in San Francisco sustained much less damage than those built on "filled in" areas. The south pier of the Golden Gate Bridge sits directly on top of the San Andreas fault! Yet it was undamaged in that quake because the weight of the bridge rests on the two towers deeply embedded into the rock beneath the sea. Remember that double-decker freeway in Oakland that collapsed? It was built on land that had been filled in. It all looked the same until the time of testing!

Jesus' story about the two foundations should cause us to make sure that we are on the right foundation spiritually. That Foundation is Jesus Christ! “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (I Cor. 3:11).

I conclude with this statement that brings balance to this entire subject: In the end we will realize that we have chosen the choice God has chosen for us before He created the earth! (Eph.1:4; II Thess.2:13)

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