

Making Intentional Choices

In most all the moments of our daily life, each of us are making choices, one choice or another. Some of those choices are momentary and have only a minor impact on our lives, but other choices are far more serious and have long-ranging, even eternal consequences.

And unfortunately, at the moment we are making those choices, though they be “intentional choices”, we aren’t always able to know just how serious our choices might really turn out to be. It’s only later, as life unfolds that the true nature of some of our choices come to light, and then, it’s often too late to undo their consequences.

In this scripture passage here in Luke chapter 7, we find people making choices, “intentional choices”, choices that will not only affect the events of their daily lives here on this earth, but more importantly, they are making choices that will determine where they will spend their eternity.

Here, just after Jesus had finished telling the people about the special ministry of repentance that John the Baptist had been teaching and preaching, and had said of John in verse 28,

28 I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” (Luke 7:28)

The people responded in verse 29 . . .

29 When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. (Luke 7:29-30)

Then Jesus continued saying,

³¹ “To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another,
We played the flute for you,
and you did not dance,
we sang a dirge,
and you did not weep.

³³ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' ³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' ³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children." (Luke 7:31-35)

Reading here about the choices that people make, I'm reminded of a testimony that my oldest son gave during an evening service while he was a student at French Camp. The central message given within his testimony was that "Life is filled with a series of choices". And it truly is!

And may I say again that every moment of every day we each are making one choice or another. Some of those choices are momentary and they might have only a minor impact within our lives, but other choices are far more serious and have long-ranging, even eternal consequences.

And, as I mentioned a moment ago, unfortunately, at the moment we are making those choices, we aren't always able to know just how serious they really are. It is only later, as life unfolds that the true nature of some of our choices come to light, and then, it's often too late to undo some of the consequences of those choices.

In these words of our scripture passage for today, we see men making choices. Some of them making right choices, but some of them making very wrong choices. And in truth, they probably really did not fully understand the eternal impact of the decisions they were making.

But it wasn't as if these men who were making wrong choices were not smart enough to know and to understand. They were plenty smart and intelligent. They were men of higher learning, tax collectors, Scribes and Pharisees. And it wasn't as if they were hearing different messages. They all were hearing the very same message being preached.

But still, with each of them having good intelligence, and each of them hearing the very same words, they were arriving at different conclusions and making different choices and decisions, choices and decisions that would impact their lives for an eternity.

Why would that be so? How can men hearing the same words, arrive at different conclusions and make very different choices? It's because conventional wisdom, education and intelligence cannot adequately prepare us to make right choices in every circumstance. Even with the highest of education, we can still remain very foolish.

Here, Jesus likened some of these very intelligent men, especially the Scribes and the Pharisees, to foolish little children playing in the streets, children who had nothing better to do than to pass their time away with mindless banter that accomplished nothing. And even worse, those very intelligent men chose to stand by and criticize and slander others for the choices they were making. Listen again to Jesus' words! Verse 31,

³¹ "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another,
We played the flute for you,
and you did not dance,
we sang a dirge,
and you did not weep. (Luke 7:31-32)

The human mind is often a curious thing to comprehend! We prize our intellect and our higher learning. With great pride, we expect our education to equip us for every circumstance of life. But it cannot! That's because all things are not perceived and understood solely with our intellect. There are other, deeper senses within our beings that reach on further and help us to have perception and understanding beyond the simple raw ability to think.

That was the nature of the problem taking place with these men that we read about here in these words. These Scribes and Pharisees were prideful men, puffed up by their knowledge and position within the religious establishment. And in their pride, they fell victim to the same confusion that men and women of all generations encounter, and that is, they failed to realize the subtle difference between "knowledge" and "wisdom".

"Knowledge", "knowing things" and knowing about things is good, but unless a person also knows how, and why and when and where to use that knowledge, their efforts will fail them. It is only as a person uses and embraces "wisdom" that his knowledge will truly begin to bear good fruit.

Listen to how God explains that truth to us using words given to us in Proverbs 4. There, through the mouth of Solomon, God said

- ⁵ Get wisdom, get understanding,
do not forget my words or swerve from them.
- ⁶ Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you,
love her, and she will watch over you.
- ⁷ Wisdom is supreme; therefore, get wisdom.
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.
- ⁸ Esteem her, and she will exalt you,
embrace her, and she will honor you.
- ⁹ She will set a garland of grace on your head
and present you with a crown of splendor." (Proverbs 4:5-9)

The wisdom spoken about in these words is a very special kind of wisdom. It is not the simple kind of understanding gained from higher education. And it's also not the conventional wisdom we gain from making the same mistakes over and over again and learning from them.

This kind of wisdom is filled with the Spirit of God and with His power and His presence. This kind of wisdom is fully able to equip us for any and every choice and decision that we will ever encounter in life.

And no doubt, these men, especially the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Priests had read and studied these truths about wisdom many times throughout the years. So, they were without excuse for not having taken them into their hearts and minds.

Here in these words of Luke chapter 7, we see choices being made for all the reasons we have mentioned. We see some wise choices and we also see some unwise choices. And in very simple words, Jesus tells us how these men's choices will turn out, that "wisdom is justified by all her children", that the wisdom of men's choices will be borne out in the results they bear, . . . if these men had genuinely received the Godly wisdom provided for them in the scriptures, their use of that wisdom would be seen in their behaviors and in the choices they would make.

In the time leading up to this encounter with Jesus, many people, along with these men, the tax collectors, the Scribes and the Pharisees had all been going out to hear the special message being preached by John the Baptist, the

“trumpeting” call to repentance. Many of them had accepted his words and had repented and been baptized. But others had not.

And here, at the time that eternal decisions and choices would be made, each used what they had within them to make their choices, some using the power of the Holy Spirit, but others using their prideful intellect.

Note these words carefully, and note the very thin line that can separate men between heaven and hell. . . . verse 29

²⁹ When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. (Luke 7:29-30)

The small space, and the word “but”, between verses 29 and 30 is all that separated these men from eternal life and eternal death. And folks, for each and every one of us, and for our loved ones, it is always exactly the same. There is only a “hair’s breadth” that separates us between eternal life with Christ and eternal death in hell.

And woe be unto most all of us, because none of us truly does fully comprehend the horror of the difference between these two conditions of the soul. We say that we do, but were we to truly understand the horrors of hell, we would be on our knees continually, begging and pleading with God the Father to not only save our own souls, we would also be pleading with Him to save our loved ones. And we would be doing everything that we could to give God’s saving message to each one of them ourselves.

Folks, this is an incredibly important and demanding need. And we must not, we dare not, turn away from our responsibility to our loved ones.

Let me convince you and me that when Jesus spoke the words, “no one comes to me except my Father draw them”, that “drawing” is very often accomplished by the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit living within you and me as we witness to our loved ones.

In other words, when you pray, “Father, please send your Holy Spirit to draw my son, my daughter, my husband, my wife, or other loved one to Christ”, God is

immediately saying back to you, "I have sent My Holy Spirit. He is in you. Now you go and give the gospel to your loved one"!

And very often, it is not as if we have to go to the far side of the sea to witness to our loved one. Often, it is a matter of just walking into the next room and saying to our loved one, "I love you too much to let you perish".

These words of Jesus are simple and straightforward. And they are a serious warning to us about the choices that each of us can make.

I urge you and me to not let these choices get lost to us as we walk out of here today. Listen to them again and consider them carefully. Verse 29,

²⁹ When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. (Luke 7:29-30)

These are simple words. It is said here that some of these men "justified God". They declared God to be "Just" and "Holy", and because He is "Just" and "Holy", He cannot permit the presence of unrepented sin to enter His kingdom. And they understood that it is God and God alone who is truly "right" and "righteous", that they, by their own "goodness" could not "justify" themselves, but that it is God and God alone who can "justify" them, who can "make right" the wretchedness of their sinful souls. No one else and nothing less could save them from their sins.

But in verse 30, others hearing the very same message, came to a different conclusion and they foolishly rejected the will of God.

Let's re-ask ourselves the basic question, "What was it that led some of these men to make one choice, while others made a different choice, why some would "justify God", but others choose not to? The answer is given within these words of verse 29,

having been baptized with the baptism of John. (Luke 7:29)

To be baptized with the baptism of John did not simply mean that those men had been immersed in water. The water was only the outward sign of a deeper work that had transpired within their souls. That deeper work was a recognition of the wretched, sinful condition of their souls, and of their desperate need for

those sins to be wiped away. That was “repentance” and that was what was meant in the words, “the baptism of John”.

Folks, I have said this to us over and over again, but it needs to continue to be said. “Repentance” is absolutely essential in the pathway to salvation.

We must not fall victim to the belief that salvation will come to us simply and solely because God loves us. Yes, He does love us, but He cannot invite us into His kingdom with our sinful nature still powerful and active within us.

Our sinful nature must be “killed out” within us and replaced by the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. Only Jesus can do that work, but we cannot ignore our part in this salvation process, and that is to “repent”, to see our sin for the wretchedness that it is and then to fall on our face in sorrow, begging Christ to take our sins from us.

These words of Jesus are calling out to us folks, and they are calling out to our loved ones to make the same choices that these first men made, to “justify God”.

And what will be our “proof” our “evidence” that we have made the right choice? We will know as all people know, verse 35,

³⁵ . . . wisdom is justified by all her children.” (Luke 7:35)

The wisdom to choose repentance over pride will prove itself out by our surrendering our hearts over to the Lord Jesus and by our behavior every moment of every day and on into eternity.

Let me say again as we close, there is just a small space between verses 29 and 30, but it separates these men from eternal life and eternal death. And that is also true for you and me and for our loved ones. There is only a “hair’s breadth” that separates us between eternal life with Christ and eternal death in hell.

Listen!

²⁹ When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. (Luke 7:29-30)

And in 2 Corinthians 7:10, we are told that

¹⁰Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Let's pray!