

Choices . . . Choices . . . Choices

January 12, 2003

Sermon Background Study

Scripture Passages

Joshua 24:14-15(NRSV)

¹⁴Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

2 Samuel 11:2-5 (NRSV)

²It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. ³David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, “This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” ⁴So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, “I am pregnant.”

Choices

When making one of several trips to the airport this Christmas, I noticed a new billboard on the side of the highway. Erected by a local church, it read, “We are defined by our dreams.” Though well-intentioned, I think the sentiment expressed on the billboard is wrong. We are not defined by our dreams; instead, we are defined by our choices, by what we do, by the many decisions we make throughout our lives. Sometimes the choice we make is small and has few consequences. Sometimes the choice is obviously important, carrying enormous consequences. Perhaps the trickiest choices are the ones that seem so trivial at the time, but can actually change the direction of our lives.

This week begins a four-week series on how we, as Christians, can go about making better choices. We will begin by looking at some of the choices, large and small, made by people of God.

Joshua

After Moses’ death, God chose Joshua to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. Under God’s guidance, Joshua embarked on a brutal war of conquest, for it was a very brutal age. The story of this conquest is told in the book of Joshua, the sixth book of the Old Testament. After taking control of lands that would become part of Israel, Joshua knew that he and the Israelites were confronted with many competing religions and deities, some of which must have been pretty attractive. They had a choice to make. Would they serve the Lord God, who had brought them this far, or, would they turn to some of the enticing idols around them? After reciting the sacred history of Israel (Joshua 24:1-13), Joshua put the choice to them quite plainly. Joshua told God’s people that he and his family had chosen God – would they do the same? The Israelites chose to serve God, though staying true to their choice proved to be difficult, even impossible.

Joshua

After escaping from Egypt and across the Red Sea, Moses led the Hebrews to Mt. Sinai and then quickly to the border of the lands that God had promised them. There, the Hebrews sent in some spies to check things out. The spies brought back fearful reports, describing the inhabitants as giants! Only two of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, urged the Hebrews to trust God’s promises and enter Canaan. The people refused to trust God and, instead, turned back in fear. God condemned their choice. God told them that none of them, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, would ever enter the Promised Land. Instead, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, until Moses and the entire generation had died. In the opening verses of the book of Joshua, God commissions Joshua to be Moses’ successor, urging him to trust in God and obey God’s law.

David

As opposed to the obviously important choice Joshua and the Israelites had to make, King David is presented with a seemingly small and inconsequential choice. One afternoon, the King saw a beautiful woman bathing on a rooftop and he wanted her. He could have ignored his feelings, but he didn't. Instead, he sent someone to learn more about her, discovering that she was married to a man named Uriah. David then made a very bad choice. He sent for the woman, Bathsheba, and slept with her. Bathsheba became pregnant with David's child. David then compounded his mistakes. He sent for her husband, who was a military officer, in the hope that Uriah would sleep with his wife, thereby covering up David's adultery. Uriah, refusing privileges not afforded his men, did not do as David hoped. David then arranged for Uriah to be killed in battle. Though David went on to marry Bathsheba, the baby died in infancy. For the writer of 2 Samuel, the baby's death was a direct consequence of David's sin.

It is pretty shocking to read such stories about our biblical heroes. Though David was Israel's greatest king and a man "after God's own heart," he was still capable of making the most tragic choices. I'm sure he never imagined the string of consequences that would flow from his decision to learn more about the woman he had seen bathing.

A Book Filled with Choices

Sometimes it almost seems that God gave us the wrong sort of book. We want the Bible to be a magic answer book that we can turn to for an answer to any question we face in life. But it is not. Sometimes we want the Bible to tell us, in plain and organized language, everything we'd like to know about God,

David

For several hundred years after Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, the people had no king – God was their king. But they wanted a king like everybody else and God eventually relented. Saul was the first king of Israel, but he disobeyed God and lost God's favor. God chose a young boy, David, to succeed Saul as Israel's king. After a long struggle with Saul, David took the throne in roughly 1000BC, when he was thirty. David ruled Israel for forty years or so, increasing the nation's power and wealth – as well as his own.

In many ways, David's story parallels that of Israel. Like Israel, David was chosen by God. He was a man "after God's own heart" and the writer of many psalms. Yet, despite God's favor, David found it difficult to walk in God's way. He murdered the husband of his pregnant lover. His son, Absalom, led a revolt against David and was killed. Yet, God made an unconditional covenant with David, promising that his house would sit on the throne in Israel. David embodied Israel's hope of a good God-given future, despite the poor choices that David or Israel or we make.

like some sort of systematic theology textbook. But it is not. The Bible is a book of stories. Some large, some small. It is through these stories that we learn about God and ourselves. The Bible is God's word for God's people and the spiritual journal of God's people, telling the story of a journey driven forward by the choices that God and humans make. God chooses a people. God chooses to love them. God chooses to pursue them even when they turn their backs on him. Abraham chooses to obey God, even to the point of being willing to sacrifice his own son, though God, in the end, didn't ask that of him. Sarah, Abraham's wife, chooses to take matters into her own hands rather than trust God's promise that he will give them a child. She sends a servant girl in to get pregnant by Abraham. The only mystery in the book of Job is whether Job will choose to continue to trust in God, despite the most horrible and inexplicable tragedies being thrust upon him. When Joshua sends a couple of scouts into Canaan, a prostitute named Rahab must decide whether to give them aid and information. She chooses well. On the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter must choose whether to proclaim his allegiance to his Lord. He chooses poorly. Later, Stephen must choose whether to deny Christ or face death. He chooses well.

Every page of the Bible and every page of our lives is filled with choices. Next week, we'll consider ~ what is a good choice? what is a bad choice? Where can we even begin to try to make the choices that God would have us make?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Genesis 16 Sarai wants an heir for Abram and she takes matters into her own hands.</p>	<p>Day 2 Joshua 2:1-24 Rahab chooses to help some strangers and becomes a hero of the faith.</p>
<p>Day 3 Job 2:1-10 Job chooses to keep his trust in God.</p>	<p>Day 4 Luke 19:1-10 A rich tax-collector, Zacchaeus, chooses to make a complete commitment to Jesus.</p>
<p>Day 5 Acts 5:27-42 Peter and the Apostles choose to defy the Jewish leadership a second time.</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

Sermon Notes

**Don't Forget!! Bible Academy Begins January 13 -- Tomorrow!!
Sign Up Now!! It is NOT too late!!**

We hope you will sign up for one of our classes. Classes are offered Mon-Thur evenings and two mornings! There are classes on the Old and New Testament, Jesus, John Wesley, John's Gospel, the Apostles' Creed, and the Kings of Israel. Wow!!

There is something for you! Please join us!

To sign up, pick up a registration form in the gathering room or register on-line at www.standrewumc.org or www.standrewccl.org!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Sometimes in life, choices that seem very important at the time turn out to be pretty inconsequential. What are some decisions you've made in your own life that seemed huge at the time, but in hindsight, really weren't very significant? On the other hand, sometimes small choices sneak up on us and we fail to see the consequences of our decision? What are some examples, from your own life, of small decisions that turned out to have big consequences?
2. Some people have a view of life in which they have little control over what happens to them. Every choice, every consequence, is thrust on them from the outside, even from God. Other people believe that they are in control of nearly every part of their life - their future is a direct consequence of their own decisions. What is your own view? How much control do you have over your life? Has your perspective on this changed? What do you think the biblical view is?
3. We live in a world that wants to drown us in decisions. Even supermarket shelves can present an intimidating array of choices. Discuss how we might begin to sort through all the decisions we face. Can they be categorized? Which categories deserve more attention? Does God care equally about them all? How can we simplify things a little!?