

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Every day, we are faced with choices. Some of them are easy. What am I going to eat? What will I wear (now for someone like my wife, maybe not so easy of a decision)? But then some choices get a little bit tougher. Like, who am I going to vote for in the coming elections? What do I want to do with my life when I grow up? Where am I going to retire after I'm finished with my job?

So many choices, so many decisions we make in our lives. Well, I have another choice for you. Who are you going to follow? God or Satan? Righteousness vs. sin? When it comes down to one area, one aspect of every one of our lives, the choice is clear. By Faith, We Will Serve the Lord.

That is the issue all of our readings for today, not just our verses from Hebrews...but that is the issue they all focus on this morning.

The choice. When Joshua and his family had to choose, to choose between a life of following God, being faithful to him, or following the idols of the heathen nations surrounding them, he made that famous bold statement. The rest of the Israelites had to choose for themselves, but "as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

And then Jesus, in our gospel, the center of an unfortunate situation, where many of his supposed disciples were dropping away, turning away from Jesus because they weren't willing to endure the challenges that would come from following Jesus.

But the Twelve, Jesus' closest friends and disciples, they were different. For them, the choice was easy. They had heard the words of Jesus, his wonderful promises for their lives. They weren't going anywhere. Where else would they go? Jesus was the only one who had the words of eternal life. They were devoted to him.

Two wonderful examples of making the right choice through hearts of faith, remaining devoted to Jesus. So it's only fitting for our verses this morning, echoing the same ideas as the other two readings, to come from the book of Hebrews, especially chapter 11. Do you know why? Do you know what Hebrews chapter 11 is known as?

The Hall of Faith. Not the hall of fame, but the Hall of Faith. Hebrews 11 is packed with Old Testament believers who faithfully followed Christ, true heroes of faith. The list includes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Samson, Samuel, David, just to name a few, all of these believers, who by faith, carried out God's work.

Well, the hero we're focusing on today is Moses. I don't think I need to go too in-depth about his background. I'm guessing most of you are familiar with the man. An Israelite born in Egypt, born into slavery, should actually have never lived past a couple weeks. Pharaoh had ordered all the Israelite baby boys to be drowned.

But in faith, Moses' parents hid him for months, and then when they couldn't do that any longer, they floated him down the Nile, trusting God would protect him.

God had special plans for Moses, which included using him to be his mouthpiece and to be the one who would lead the Israelites out of slavery to the Promised Land. So God caused something wonderful to happen. As Moses was floating on the Nile, it just so happened that Pharaoh's daughter was out bathing in the same river, and she just happened to come upon Moses, and she just happened to have compassion on the baby and decide to raise this Israelite boy as her own child.

And that's where our verses pick up. The same choice which stood in front of Joshua and the entire nation of Israel, the same choice Jesus' disciples faced, that's the choice Moses was dealing with. The easy life of following idols or a life of struggles which come from being a child of God.

By faith, he chose God. Now, don't think that was a no-brainer for Moses. This is what he was giving up. Egypt, the most powerful empire at that time, and Moses was part of the royal family. Riches beyond compare, far more than even the priceless treasure found in King Tut's tomb years ago. All that wealth, at his finger-tips. A guaranteed easy life, but one following the gods of this world.

But Moses gave that all up. Instead, he was mistreated, disgraced by Pharaoh over and over again. To him, that was the priceless treasure, an honor surpassed by nothing. Because it was all for the sake of Christ. Moses gave up everything "worldly" so he could follow Jesus.

The temporary was tempting. The pleasures of sin were tempting. But by faith, Moses was looking to the eternal, trusting in the invisible, in God. That was the real reward.

Looking at Moses, at Joshua, at Jesus' disciples, at their words, at their actions, it puts you and me to shame, right? Because for them, the choice was clear...the choice was easy. A life of following God and his Word with the promise of an eternal reward, for them, far outweighed the transitory, the earthly pleasures and the easy life they could have had for themselves by satisfying their own sinful natures.

The same choice, for us, should be clear. It should be easy. Except, it isn't. We can make the promise to God, that we're going to live our lives for him. We're not going to give in to the temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful natures. We're not going to give sin a foothold in our lives. In everything, we're going to serve the Lord.

But then, you know, life gets in the way. I want to live my life for God, and shine the light of Christ to everyone I meet. But when I hear how Christians around the world are persecuted, or I see how my own friends scoff at religion in general, maybe even how they poke fun of me for going to church, I find it so much more convenient to keep my faith to myself and just try to fit in with others, even if that does occasionally mean letting sinful actions and attitudes shine forth.

Or, the thought, does serving God mean with everything I have, everything I am? Because then I have this dilemma, where I want to give more for offerings to God, but I also just need that new living room furniture set. God won't be hurt if I give him the shaft just for a couple months, will he?

Or even, I admit, I'm a little behind on my daily talks with God, you know, my Bible reading, my personal devotions, and my praying to God, but can God realistically expect me to fit him into my hectic schedule every day?

My friends, the devil makes that choice so difficult in our lives. We want to serve God so badly, but Satan, and our own sinful natures, they make this life and its temptations look so much more alluring.

But don't let your sinful nature fool you. You can't serve both masters. God makes that oh so clear when he says, "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." God wants all of us, our undivided love and devotion. But, unfortunately, we get caught up in the here and now, in this life, with all its evils and sins, and we don't always follow God as we ought.

Why we make the decision so tough on ourselves, it's so sad. But that's what we do. When the choice is between following God or sin, you know who often wins out. Sin does.

Well, God also has a choice. To let us suffer the consequences our sins deserve, with the ultimate punishment of eternal death, or to shower his love and grace on us. You know what his choice was. When the choice was God's, he chose us. He chose to save you and me.

The fact that you and I sin against God, multiple times every day, following the vain pleasures of this world and of our own sinful desires, that didn't deter God from saving us.

All along, God knew we were going to be sinful. But all along, God's plan was to send his only Son, Jesus. Jesus, who lived that perfect life in our place. Jesus, who went to the cross for us, to die for our sins, so they could be forgiven. Jesus, who didn't stay dead, but rose victoriously. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus defeated sin and Satan for us.

How awesome is that love of God, because as much as we don't always follow him, he never stops caring for us. He never stops forgiving us. That love enables us to live for God. That love enables us to follow God in all our thoughts, words, and actions, the greatest choice.

The choice, which really isn't ours. You see, when we obey God's laws, when we live how he wants us to, we can't take the credit for it. I mean, we do it out of faith, a faith in Jesus, worked in us by God. And when we obey God, he's the one who works through us to follow him, every time.

So when you and I let our lights shine, it's God who's shining through every one of us. When we do whatever we can to put God at the top of our lives, it's God who's working through us, enabling us to do it. And when we commit ourselves to following God, putting all the pleasures and evils of the world behind us, it's God who helps us do that.

So you know why we do that, why we, in faith, commit to following God in everything we do in our lives? Go back to Joshua, and the disciples, and Moses. Heroes of faith. You know, they only had God's Word and promises to hold onto. Giving up the luxuries of this life to serve God, they had no physical evidence what the reward for doing that would be.

But they had faith. Faith's eyes see not only the present but especially the future. Faith's wisdom calculates not only the beginning but especially the ending. They were willing to give up the temporary, banking on the extraordinary, the joys and riches of heaven. For them, that was reason enough.

That's reason enough for you and me as well. Now, if you've ever seen a horse race before, you might notice they put blinders around the horses eyes. That's so they won't be distracted by what is going on around them, but would focus on reaching the goal, the finish line.

That's how you and I are. Putting on the blinders of faith. As 2 Corinthians says, fixing "our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." An eternity of life with Jesus in heaven. That's the best reward there is.

So, is it really even a choice? Yes, the world with its temptations looks so enticing, but it's not worth it. Putting up with the struggles that come from being a believer surrounded by unbelievers, it's only temporary. The disgrace won't last. But our eternal reward will. And that's something to hang on to.

So, what's your choice? That's easy. By faith, we will serve the Lord. Amen.