

“Choose Wisely” *Matthew 1¹³⁻²⁷*

Introduction

Choices. We all make them every day of our lives. Some choices (dessert) seem pretty easy. **SLIDE1** But not all choices in life are so simple, **SLIDE2** like choosing which career path to take. With a growing number of viewing options **SLIDE3** what we choose and how much can lead to some unexpected problems. There’s an ancient proverb **SLIDE4** that posts a warning, Beware, “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”^{14:12}

When it comes to choosing a spiritual path, or no path at all, there is a common view that everyone will eventually end up in the same God-place. Now such a view is attractive in our culture given how tolerant and simple it seems.

But it is really true? Imagine that you meet a team of financial advisors who tell you, “It doesn’t matter what kind of investments you choose for retirement, or if you don’t choose to invest anything at all, everyone gets the same benefits.” Would you believe them? But it’s so tolerant and simple...**And illogical & costly!** How much more so when it comes to choices that affect our eternity! It pays to know our options and what is at stake, and to get wise counsel from an expert in these matters, like Jesus. Jesus said... **SLIDES5,6,7**

Biblical Contact

A) The Best Choice is the Narrow Gate

What is immediately striking in these verses is the stark nature of the choice before us. We would prefer to be given many more options than what Jesus puts before us. But Jesus is very clear *in his expert opinion* that there is only one way, one path that leads to life, and that such a choice involves *deliberately* choosing a very particular option. **SLIDE8**

I say *deliberately* because of how Jesus describes “*the road that leads to destruction*” (“broad”). That gate is “*wide*” and “*many enter through it*”. So if you think, I don’t really want to put any time and effort into this, I’ll just follow the

crowd, in Jesus' expert opinion, that is a very costly mistake. (e.g. the Marathon runners who followed the crowd...the wrong way). The right way will involve having to go *against* the flow and being in the minority. **SLIDE9** = “*Wrong is still wrong even if everyone is doing it. Right is right even if only you are doing it*”]

- Working at reconciliation in your home & in the marketplace (Mt. 5²¹⁻²⁶)
- Making good viewing choices (Mt. 5²⁷⁻³⁰)
- Making honesty the *only* policy (Mt. 5³³⁻³⁷)
- Not retaliating, and actively working at loving our enemies (Mt. 5³⁸⁻⁴⁸)

Jesus is clear that his way is challenging and difficult. But that is because it is the only choice that “leads to life” and when we think about it, the best choices and best results in life usually require great personal investment, discipline & sacrifice **SLIDE10** – *Nothing worth having comes easy*] (e.g. Having children).

B) The Best Choice Requires Looking Deeper at Our Guides

Jesus also gives us choosers a warning: “Watch out!” **SLIDE11** he says, “for false prophets”, or as translator Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message*, “*Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity. Chances are they are out to rip you off some way or the other. Don't be impressed with charisma; look for character....A genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook.*” The best choice requires looking deeper at our spiritual advisors & guides because not everything or everyone who cloaks themselves in sincerity or God-language is the real deal. (self-serving? or sacrificial?—Php. 2)

C) The Best Choice Requires Looking Deeper at Ourselves

Before calling for a final decision Jesus also prods us to look more deeply at ourselves. **SLIDE13** Why? Because we can be gravely self-deceived. How so? Well, Jesus highlights two common self-deceptions: first, relying on a merely external faith (vv.21-23). Talk like sincere believers (“Lord, Lord”...notice that **it is double**). They also rely on the works they have done in his name (prophecy, exorcisms, miraculous healings = apostle like deeds^{2Cor.12:12}). It isn't that a verbal commitment to him doesn't matter, because it does (e.g. Rom. 9⁹⁻¹⁰).

And our faith should express itself in visible ways (e.g. James 1²²⁻²⁵). But Jesus' shocking response in verse 23 **[SLIDE14]** underlines the key issues: "I never knew you" = genuine relationship; "evildoers" = genuine righteousness (in our public **and** private life = the most difficult work).

Secondly, Jesus warns us against the unacceptable alternative of a merely intellectual faith in verses 24-27 (explain with a **SLIDE15**).

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; *yet it did not fall*, because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, *and it fell with a great crash*."

- A shocking ending by putting the story of the foolish man last...CRASH!

Sometimes we see need to stare loss in the face to wake us up to what we are building our significance on (e.g. Job loss, loss of a loved one, etc.).

D) The Best Choice Requires An Authoritative Guide

As the crowd listened to Jesus on the Hillside the lasting impression they had was not that they were listening to an impossible dreamer, or a detached mystic, who was out of touch with reality. On the contrary they were impressed with his absolute sanity and God-like spiritual authority ("the crowds were *astonished*" = strong word in Greek—blown away!). In comparison, all others sounded and seem as flimsy as the foolish man in his closing story.

Conclusion / Application

- The choice of those today who decided to follow Jesus was very wise...
- The visible differences that have been happening in their lives confirm it...
- Decide to follow, and keep following Jesus...