

CHOOSING THE BEST

LUKE 10:38-42

M.I. AS BELIEVERS MATURE IN THEIR FAITH; THEIR CHOICES SHOULD NOT BE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL. THEIR CHOICES SHOULD BE BETWEEN WHAT'S GOOD AND WHAT'S BEST.

I. JESUS CHOSE THE BEST (VS 38a)

Jesus was clear as to the best choice. He moved steadily towards his destiny in Jerusalem.

- A. THE JOURNEY
- B. A VILLAGE WITH A PURPOSE

II. SEVERAL GOOD CHOICES (VS 38b-40a)

If we are true believers, we should constantly have many good choices available to us.

- A. AN EXCELLENT CHOICE (38b)
- B. ANOTHER EXCELLENT CHOICE (39)
- C. A VERY GOOD CHOICE (40a)

III. SIGNS OF A SECOND BEST CHOICE (VS 40b-42)

Even though our choice may not be sinful, it can still leave us unsatisfied.

- A. ACCUSING OTHERS (40b)
- B. DISTRACTED (41)
- C. MISSING THE BEST (42)

Choosing The Best

Luke 10:38-42

We have to keep in mind what the situation is as we study through this section. Jesus is now on His way to Jerusalem where He has a very special date with destiny. It is imperative that His disciples start to understand what is going to happen and it is important they understand the nature of the Kingdom Jesus is setting up. The passage we are studying today is clear. There are no textual problems or interpretation problems. And yet, every time I have taught this passage, it has brought out all sorts of emotions. In almost every teaching situation, people have wanted to side with the person Jesus rebukes and they have wanted to criticize Jesus' handling of the situation.

The problem is that in most cultures, we find that Jesus wants to move us from good to best. In other words, we often do things that are good culturally but they are not often the best choice. I'm hoping that most of us are growing in our Christian walk where we no longer have to struggle with making a choice between what is good and what is evil. I know that many of us still struggle with choosing good over evil. In other words, some still struggle with lust, with addictions, and with other types of sin. However, as we mature, our struggle should become choosing the best choice out of many good choices. For example, when Adam and Eve were in the garden, they had tons of good choices. In other words, they could eat from any of the thousands of fruit trees in the garden. There was only one bad choice. They were only prohibited from eating of one tree in the garden. Unfortunately, they chose the one bad choice. That bad choice has infected the human race with sin that still haunts us today.

Our passage this morning should describe the dilemma we find ourselves in on a regular basis. We need to take time and choose the best option. The problem is that often our sense of culturally defined duties interferes with making the best choice. Let me give you an example. A father was in bed and expected to die within hours. His children gathered around him and were speaking their tender love for him. The oldest son leaned into him and said, "Papa, is there anything you want?"

The old man whispered, "Yes, I do have one wish. I smell something familiar and delicious. It smells like your mother's apple strudel. Please bring me a piece of your mother's strudel. There is nothing like it in this world."

The son was gone to the kitchen longer than expected. When he returned empty handed, the dying father asked, "What took you so long and where is the apple strudel?"

The son looked at his father with a sad face and said, "Papa, you know mother. She is always so practical and so strict. She says the strudel is for after the funeral."

So you see, the man's wife wanted to make sure everything was ready and that there was enough food so the family would look good. However, a better choice may have been to give her husband one last taste of strudel. We see the craziness of this choice, but we often do the same.

The main idea of this morning's text is this. AS BELIEVERS MATURE IN THEIR FAITH, THEIR CHOICES SHOULD NOT BE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL. THEIR CHOICES SHOULD BE BETWEEN WHAT'S GOOD AND WHAT'S BEST. In other words, we can often make good and acceptable decision while missing better choices. As I thought about this passage, it seems as if our ideas of culture and the values we were raised with are most often the things that cause us to miss God's best for us.

JESUS CHOSE THE BEST (VS 38a)

In the first half of verse 38 we can see that Jesus chose the best. JESUS WAS CLEAR AS TO THE BEST CHOICE. HE MOVED STEADILY TOWARDS HIS DESTINY IN JERUSALEM. In other words, He could have taken many side trips and healed many people. However, He knew what he was supposed to do.

The journey is now what is important. Back in Luke 9 verse 51 Jesus made a clear choice to head for Jerusalem. We must keep in mind that we are on a journey as well. Discipleship is a life-long journey. It is our primary reason for living. Being single minded will help us to consistently choose what is best.

On His journey to Jerusalem, He stops at a village with a purpose. From John's Gospel, we learn that this village is Bethany. Bethany is about 2 miles east of Jerusalem. He will have some work to do here as well. In fact, He will have to teach some lessons about resurrection when He raises a man named Lazarus from the dead. But the point is that Jesus is resolutely headed for Jerusalem. JESUS WAS CLEAR AS TO THE BEST CHOICE. HE MOVED STEADILY TOWARDS HIS DESTINY IN JERUSALEM.

SEVERAL GOOD CHOICES (VS 38b-40a)

In the second half of verse 38 through the first half of verse 40 we encounter several good choices. For us that means that IF WE ARE TRUE BELIEVERS, WE SHOULD CONSTANTLY HAVE MANY GOOD CHOICES AVAILABLE TO US. There are several good choices made at this house.

In the last half of verse 38 we see a woman make an excellent choice. Here we meet a woman named Martha. There are several interesting about this woman. First of all, she is the one who seems to be in charge of the household. This would be a good time to point out that Luke in his Gospel and in the book of Acts often

portrays women in prominent positions. Women play an important role in Luke's writings. Martha has a brother named Lazarus and a sister named Mary. Martha seems to be a very gracious hostess to open her house up to Jesus and His entourage. Hospitality was considered to be a great virtue in Greek and Roman culture, Middle Eastern culture, and in Judaism. This woman is a very upstanding woman. I'm still not sure that she knows exactly Who Jesus is, but she knows He is an important religious teacher. She has made an excellent choice by inviting Jesus into her home.

Another excellent choice is described in verse 39. Here we meet Martha's sister Mary. It is important to notice where Mary is. She is sitting at Jesus' feet and taking in all His teaching. First let's deal with where she is sitting. She is sitting at the Lord's feet. This is beginning of each of our discipleship journeys. It is a sign of humility and a willingness to learn and to obey. It really doesn't matter where we come from, this is the starting point. To be sure, people who were raised in a Christian home ought to have some advantage because hopefully their parents modeled what life in Christ was all about. They may have even steered away from some awful and devastating sins. However, just like people who have come from some extremely difficult situations and have involved themselves in all sorts of heinous sins and are living with some devastating consequences of sins, we all need to come to Jesus the same way. We must come to Him in humility. In other words, we need to see ourselves in comparison to His holiness and His righteousness. This should leave us totally broken and in no way confident in our own goodness. To the person raised in a Christian household, he or she may look better than others but when compared to the righteousness of Christ, there is virtually no difference. That's why it is often harder for "good" people to come to Jesus in faith. The first step demands a great deal of humility. It is saying to Jesus, "I am a pathetic sinner who is hopelessly lost and helpless to do anything about it. I am deserving of an eternity in hell separated from You for all eternity. Please forgive me of my sins." Without this type of humility, it is impossible to be saved.

But sitting at someone's feet can also be a sign of love. As little children, we often went to sit at our parents' feet while they read to us or just held us.

She wasn't just sitting at Jesus' feet. Luke tells us that she was listening to what He had to say. She was listening to Jesus' teachings. This truly was unusual for women to be learning. For the most part, intellectual pursuits were left to the men while household duties were left to the women. Mary is not where her cultural designation dictates she should be. She has broken the religious and cultural norms of the day. She is sitting in a room full of men listening to Jesus teach. No doubt some were probably commenting on this breach of protocol. But anyone who comes to sit at Jesus' feet to learn and to be known has made an excellent choice. However, what makes this choice equally dangerous is that sitting at Jesus' feet in humility and learning is that once we learn what Jesus commands, we must submit to that teaching and obediently live accordingly. So we have seen Martha make an

excellent choice by opening up her house to Jesus and Mary make an excellent choice by sitting at Jesus' feet.

Let me just stop here and ask each one of us. Have we opened up our heart to Jesus? Jesus said that He stands at the door of our hearts knocking and calling out to each one of us personally. He waits for us to open the door and to invite Him in. Please, I beg you to make an excellent choice by opening the door of your heart and inviting Jesus in. Once we open the door and invite Him in, He promises to come in and settle down.

After two excellent choices, we see only a very good choice in the first half of verse 40. Martha is busy. She is cooking, and serving, and making sure all the guests have enough and are comfortable. She is making sure that all their needs were met. What a woman! She is making sure this party is going smoothly and the guests are having a good time. I don't know what kind of culture each one of you come from but in Italian and Chinese cultures, this is exactly what a high class, well cultured woman would do. Everyone would be complimenting her on the great job. But something is not quite right here.

Luke says that Martha was distracted by all the preparations. That word distracted in Greek is *parispao*. Literally it means to draw away. It could be like a person being drawn away into a trap. It means to be distracted. Metaphorically it means to be driven about mentally or to be over occupied. The two questions this word forces us to ask are, "What is she being distracted from and what is distracting her?" Luke gives us the answer to the second question. Her preoccupation with all the preparations is distracting her. She has all sorts of details in her mind. She knows when the salad has to go out. She knows when the second course has to be presented, the third, and the dessert. She has to make sure she keeps cleaning up and washing dishes. She also has to keep filling up the wine glasses. All the expected duties of a hostess are distracting her. But what is she being distracted from? She is being drawn away from simply being with Jesus. This may be a one of a lifetime chance for her to actually talk to and interact with Jesus. Think about the billions of people who have lived during all of human history. How many have ever got to introduce themselves to Jesus? How many of them had a personal opportunity to receive teaching from Jesus? How many received a physical touch from Jesus? She is being distracted from all this.

Let's say that we have opened the door of our hearts to Jesus and let's say that He has settled in. How much intentional time do we spend with Him? Do we go off to work in the morning and leave Jesus alone at home? What are some of the things that distract people from interacting with God? What distracts you from spending time with God? Martha made one excellent choice. She invited Jesus into her home. She made a very good choice by hosting a party. She took care of all the food and drink details. However, that very good choice prevented her from another excellent choice of getting up close and personal with Jesus. On the other hand, Mary broke all the cultural rules. She sat there in the room, right at the feet of Jesus. She is one of the few persons in all of history to touch Jesus and to sit with

men to be personally taught by Jesus. That was an excellent choice. We must constantly ask ourselves if we are missing God's best choice. IF WE ARE TRUE BELIEVERS, WE SHOULD CONSTANTLY HAVE MANY GOOD CHOICES AVAILABLE TO US.

SIGNS OF A SECOND BEST CHOICE (VS 40b-42)

There are several telltale signs of a second best choice as described in the second half of verse 40 through verse 42. EVEN THOUGH OUR CHOICE MAY NOT BE SINFUL, IT CAN STILL LEAVE US UNSATISFIED. In other words, we can be doing what we think is right and still be left empty. The problem with our analyzing our behavior is that there is nothing that we could point to that was sinful. And most of the time if we were to ask our friends what we were doing wrong, they would be hard pressed to tell us what we were doing wrong. Martha was doing perfectly what culture expected of her. She was the perfect hostess and everybody would no doubt have complimented her. And yet, she is not satisfied. In fact she appears to be irritated. The first sign of second best choice is described in the first half of verse 40 as accusing others. She accused her sister of being lazy or simply rebellious. She then accuses Jesus of not knowing what is right and wrong. She further accused Him of not caring.

Martha informs Jesus that her sister has neglected her responsibility. Mary was expected to be helping Martha serve. But she was just sitting on her can doing nothing but listening to Jesus. Martha is angry because she has to do all the work by herself.

But now look what she does. She asks Jesus, "Don't You care?" She is saying to Jesus, "Either You don't know what's right and wrong Jesus or You don't care about what's right and wrong. Here I am busting my butt to serve You and make this party successful. My sister just sits at Your feet and You don't say a thing. What's the matter with You? Tell her to help me!" She ended up giving Jesus a direct command to rebuke Mary.

I can guarantee that if we are making less than the best choices, we will find ourselves overwhelmed, frustrated, and starting to accuse others of our plights and even start to think that Jesus either doesn't care about us or He doesn't know what He is doing. For the most part, it really is hard to help people come to the realization that even though they have not made a sinful choice, they have made an inferior choice. If people come to me and ask me, "Where have I sinned in this?" The answer of course is, "You have not sinned but perhaps you have made some unwise choices." The problem is that people who work themselves into these types of predicaments usually stop listening after the phrase, "You have not sinned."

Martha feels righteously indignant. She knows she is right. And so she feels free to tell Jesus what to do. She address Jesus as Lord but she is surely not treating Him as Lord. She presumes to instruct Jesus on ethics. She says, "Tell her to help me!"

There is no doubt that when an Asian woman or an Italian woman hear this, they immediately start to take offense at Mary and side with Martha. You can hear them in the background saying, "Yeah Jesus, You tell that Mary to get up and help!"

I can't begin to tell you how many times women get up and vocally take the side of Martha. When I tell them it's Jesus Who takes Mary's side, they struggle with anger and guilt.

They want to say, "Fine then who will do the work? It's better to just sit down and do nothing." Well, the answer to that is both yes and no. Verse 41 points out the problem that Martha was distracted. In this case, it may well have been that Martha should have opened her house to Jesus and just sat at his feet with Mary and listened.

I don't know that I have read anyone who has made this observation but remember Luke's Gospel is not necessarily in chronological order. It is interesting to me that this incident follows right on the heels of the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the ones who were judged to be wrong were the two men who did nothing. At Martha's house, the woman who did nothing was judged to be righteous. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the man who busied himself and worked alone was the one judged righteous while at Martha's house, the one doing all the work was judged to be wrong. The excuse for failure in the parable of the Good Samaritan was a religious reason. The priest and Levite did not want to render themselves ritually unclean by coming into contact with blood and or a dead body. The reason for success at Martha's house was religious as well. Mary sat down to be instructed by the Jewish Messiah.

I said all that to make this point. I'm going to give everyone involved the benefit of the doubt and say they all had pure motives. Being ritually pure was considered to be very important to Jews, especially the clergy. If someone came in contact with blood or a dead body, they would be ceremonially unclean. During the time they were unclean, they could not participate in any sort of worship.

Martha was trying to be a good and godly woman by inviting Jesus and his entourage to her house. She went out of her way to make them comfortable, feed them a spectacular meal, and make sure they had enough to eat and drink. This really is a wonderful thing to do.

The Good Samaritan became ceremonially unclean as soon as he touched the wounded man. However, he saved his life at great personal expense.

Mary sat at the feet of Jesus the Messiah, learning all she could from Him in the short time she would have Him.

Here is the key. If we know the heart of God, then we will be able to determine which choice is the best. Let's take the priest and the Levite who passed by the dying man. Jesus made it clear during His teaching and healing ministries that

saving lives is more important than religious duties. For example if the wounded man was an unbeliever and the religious people passed him by, when the man died, he would go to hell. On the other hand, if the religious men stopped and helped the man and because of their love and kindness the man was converted to faith, when he died he would spend eternity in heaven. The price paid would be that the religious men would be ceremonially unclean for a day. If they were in tune with God, they would be able to see the best choice. A life saved from an eternity in hell is much more important than any religious duty.

If Jesus were only going to spend the night at Mary and Martha's house, then it would be better to get every bit of teaching and blessing from Jesus before He went on to Jerusalem. I'm pretty sure that Jesus and the boys would have been happy with sandwiches and chips. No one was going to physically starve but some could starve spiritually if they didn't get a chance to hear Jesus. In fact, Martha herself may starve spiritually if she didn't hear and receive Jesus' message. The point is that if everything was normal, Mary should have helped Martha run around and put on a great party. If the man on the road just had a superficial wound and there were other people there to help, it would have been good for the priest and the Levite not to touch the blood. Remaining ritually pure would have been desirable.

The religious men were distracted from doing the best thing. Martha was distracted from doing the best thing.

Jesus will not play into Martha's confusion. He gently answers her, "Martha, Martha, your heart is troubled because of all the anxiety you have about making everything perfect." There is some hint in the wording that there was a little pride in Martha. In other words, she wanted to do a good job so people would see her goodness. At least she expected Jesus to be appreciative. She didn't get that from Jesus.

Instead, in verse 42 she receives a mild rebuke for missing the best. Jesus informed Martha that the best thing she could have done is to sit down with Mary and enjoy His company. Any amount of great food or drink would be out of everyone's system by the next day. However, the love and friendship Mary and Jesus had would last forever. No one could ever take that away.

Since my father died and I took over the patriarchal role, I have argued and fought until I finally got my way. Italian and Chinese women cook day after day, week after week, year after year. And on holidays, they feel obligated to cook even more dishes and put out the good dishes and silverware. I have argued for years that a holiday ought to be a holiday for everyone, including the ladies. My feeling is that on holidays, we should order carry out food and eat on paper plates. Then when dinner is over, we throw away all the paper plates, cups, and plastic silverware. Then we just sit around and enjoy one another's company. About 5 years ago, I won the argument so all the women told me to go ahead and arrange the dinner. It was easy. I ordered some cooked dinners from Dominick's, bought some carry out Chinese, and some pizzas. I served them on paper plates. How did it work?

All the ladies love it. They don't have to stand around the sink doing dishes or cleaning up, and they didn't have to slave the day before and that day getting food ready. We all enjoy the holiday and I haven't heard any complaints about the food.

Don't miss God's best. There may be times when you need to step down from serving in the church because you are angry or find your soul troubled. However, there are times when you need to get up and get involved in the ministries of the church. The norm is that involve we ourselves in church ministry. That is often where we find God's best. However, if we are over involved, or driven by pride, then we will quickly find ourselves, critical, angry, depressed, judgmental, and empty. Authentic service for God leaves us energized, happy, and full of grace. The problem is that oftentimes we won't recognize we have chosen poorly because the choice itself was not sinful. So pay attention to the signs of a second best choice. **EVEN THOUGH OUR CHOICE MAY NOT BE SINFUL, IT CAN STILL LEAVE US UNSATISFIED.**

I'm sure that there are times in our lives where we must struggle to avoid an evil choice in order to make a good choice. But that should not be so common. **AS BELIEVERS MATURE IN THEIR FAITH, THEIR CHOICES SHOULD NOT BE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL. THEIR CHOICES SHOULD BE BETWEEN WHAT'S GOOD AND WHAT'S BEST.**

I know the passage I am about to quote is an exhortation to choose God. Joshua said this to the people when they conquered the land:

"14So honor the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD alone. 15But if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:14-15 / NLT).

I would say to us, "There are so many things that are not evil in themselves that don't necessarily draw us closer to God. Put those things away and choose to follow God. As for me, I want God's best.

Here is how the people responded to Joshua:

16The people replied, "We would never forsake the LORD and worship other gods" (Joshua 24:16 / NLT).

I'm hoping all of us commit ourselves to looking for God's best in our life and then make that choice.