



Have you ever made the wrong choice? Have you taken the blue pill? I've made many dumb decisions. I want to start this morning by sharing with you one of the stupidest things I've ever done in ministry. In fact, it was the first event I ever put on for our brand new Student Ministries in Las Vegas. If you are a youth pastor or parent, this is a story of what **not** to do, ever. After moving to Las Vegas the summer of 2000, I began to gather and meet with a small group of teenagers. In an effort to reach out and gather new students to our ministry I came up with what I thought was a fantastic idea—cliff jumping at Lake Mojave! It was at this point that our Lead Pastor should have said, "Rob, are you nuts? Someone is going to get hurt and we'll get sued." But, since he was a former youth pastor, he thought it was a great idea and he even came along with his kids!

Lake Mojave is a great little lake on the Arizona/Las Vegas border. I had previously scouted out the cliff jumping spot and knew exactly where to go. We gathered about a dozen kids and headed out for an epic day of cliff jumping. Once we arrived at the lake, I noticed that the water levels had drastically dropped. What was once a 20- to 30-foot jump was now a 40- to 50-foot jump. As I peered over the edge of the cliff, with nervous teenagers behind me, I thought to myself, "This is not a good idea!" Since I was the cool, young, crazy youth pastor, I jumped off, no big deal. A few of the boys went next.

Then the girls started to jump. For some reason, as they jumped, the girls could not stay vertical and would hit the water at a 45 degree angle. The first girl came out of the water screaming and I jumped in and helped her get to the shore. Her entire leg began to develop a nasty bruise from the hip down to the calf. Not good. Then, one of the pastor's sons, Kurt, stepped on a piece of glass and cut his foot. We were off to a fantastic start! Thankfully everyone came home in tacked and I was able to share the Gospel with these kids before leaving. Needless to say we never did that event again!

Have you ever made a really bad decision? Have you ever made a poor choice? We all have. I used to tell our teenagers that life is all about choices and consequences. Good choices lead to good consequences and vice versa. Robert Frost, in his famous poem, *The Road Not Taken*, expressed this idea of important choices,

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,

I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Jesus also talked about the choices we make and described them as two roads. Listen to Matthew 7:13-14: "**Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**"

How do we take the "road less traveled by"? How do we find the narrow road that leads to life? If you are a follower of Jesus, we tend to think that this choice is made only once in life—the time we decided to follow Jesus Christ. That is the most important decision any of us will make. Following Jesus though is not just a one-time decision. The reality is that we face difficult choices every minute of every day. Some lead us down the broad road to destruction and others lead us down the path to abundant life. Solomon's life was filled with a series of seemingly small and insignificant choices that would eventually lead to his ruin. God graciously gave Solomon a choice and it came at the apex of his success.

God's Second Appearance to Solomon

When Solomon had finished building the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the Lord appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The Lord said to him: "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there. As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.' But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this temple?' People will

answer, 'Because they have forsaken the Lord their God, who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the Lord brought all this disaster on them'" (1 Kings 9:1–9).

Solomon has finished building the temple and the royal palace. It took Solomon 20 years to complete these two building tasks. And now, half way into his reign as the King of Israel, he had *"achieved all he had desired to do."* Solomon was the wealthiest, most powerful and wisest king ever. Wow. Can you imagine coming to the place in life where everything you've ever wanted to achieve you actually accomplished? My family and I can barely keep up on our laundry, let alone the bigger things of life. Not Solomon. Everything he had set his mind to, he accomplished. These were no small tasks either. Not only did he build a temple for the Lord and a royal complex, but Solomon was successful in almost every area of life.

It's here that we find Solomon at the pinnacle of success, back at Gibeon where the Lord initially came to him in a dream. We don't know how much time has passed from the Dedication of the Temple until now, but in similar fashion, God comes to Solomon a second time to express his satisfaction with the king's prayer for the people and for the temple. God tells Solomon that his name and presence will forever be in the Temple. But, dark clouds are looming on the horizon. God warns Solomon and Israel to walk faithfully before him. If they don't make the right choice, disaster will strike.

The first lesson we learn from this second encounter with God is this: Everyone has a choice to make in life, either for God or against him and the choice we make will end either in blessing or disaster. Let me put it another way—obedience leads to blessing and disobedience leads to disaster. Solomon is faced with a choice, a fork in the road. One road is the way of obedience that leads to blessing. The other leads down the road to disaster.

God is pleased with the fact that Solomon built a temple for the people of God to worship. It was a great architectural feat. But, God quickly turns his attention to Solomon himself, *"As for YOU."* One verse is given to God's acceptance of the temple and five verses are given as a warning to Solomon. What God wanted for Solomon is the same thing Solomon had asked for in his first dream—a listening heart. A heart that is faithful. A heart that is full of integrity and uprightness. A heart for godliness. This is not simply obeying God's law and doing his religious duties. God was concerned with the condition of Solomon's heart. God warns Solomon to keep listening, to keep following and choosing for God. If he does, Solomon will continue to experience the joys of walking with God and experiencing his blessing. Solomon will also leave an incredible legacy of sons on the throne and a dynasty **if** Solomon continues to walk with the Lord.

There is another way to go though. This road is the way of disobedience that leads to disaster. This is the pathway of idolatry. God clearly warns Solomon and describes what that road will look like. God wants Solomon to know what the consequences of his actions will be. This warning even includes his children, *"If you or your descendants turn away from me."* If that happens, then Israel will experience three disasters. First, they will be cut off from the promised land. Second, the temple will be destroyed. And third, Israel will become the laughing stock of the nations. These consequences would be absolutely devastating to the nation of Israel.

At first glance, you may be thinking that Solomon had a pretty high standard to live up to. Can anyone really obey God like this? Who can truly walk with God faithfully, with integrity of heart and uprightness and do **all** God commands and observe **all** his decrees and laws? Was God threatening Solomon? No, this was God's grace. This was a gracious warning, not a threat. God didn't want Solomon to fail. But he also wasn't impressed with all that Solomon was doing for God. God cared most about his relationship with Solomon. This was a matter of the heart, not religiosity and legalism. God was not putting the "fun" back in "fundamental." God wanted Solomon's heart. If God has his heart, he has all of Solomon. The same is true for us.

From God's perspective, the issue here has to do with idolatry. Israel's natural tendency was to turn away from God to serve and worship other gods. God wanted Solomon and Israel to love him with **all their heart**. Solomon's heart, like ours, was divided and he slowly began to walk away from God. For us, this is a gracious warning about where our own idols will lead. Anything we worship in place of God is idolatry. We all worship something. Anything we place at the center of our lives is idolatry. Like Solomon, our natural bent is to turn away from God and turn towards things of this world in worship. "Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love, here's my heart Lord take and seal it," are words to that great hymn that still ring true today. What are our idols? The same ones Solomon wrestled with—money, possessions, sex, physical pleasure, power, and control. Obedience leads to blessing and disobedience leads to disaster.

Solomon's Past Success

There's a second lesson we can learn from Solomon's life and that is: Everyone has a choice to make in life, and this choice is always before us, even if we have made the right choice before.

The first time God appeared to Solomon in a dream, he asked Solomon, "Ask for anything you want and I'll give it to you." Solomon asked for a wise and listening heart. God was so pleased with his request that he also gave Solomon wisdom, riches, honor and a long life. What's really interesting is that in

this second appearance did you notice how Solomon responds? He doesn't say a word! There is absolutely no recorded response to God's warning. Even though Solomon made the right choice before, in the first dream, it doesn't look like he made the right choice in this second dream. We don't know what Solomon was thinking. The author is silent. But, what we can see is another list of all of Solomon's accomplishments. While this list looks impressive, they are actually indictments about Solomon's wandering heart.

Solomon was a total success. He accomplished everything he wanted to in life. And the Lord blessed him in everything he did. He was at peace with other nations; Israel was organized effectively; he built a palace complex and the Lord's Temple; he made alliances with Tyre and Egypt; he accumulated great wealth, and he wrote great literature. He's done it all.

Verses 10–28 highlight even more of his accomplishments. He was successful in international trade and foreign relations. Hiram gave King Solomon four tons of gold. The total amount, in today's dollar, would be \$853 million dollars. Solomon also had power over his people. He used huge armies of forced labor to complete the massive building projects he undertook. Solomon even had a royal Navy and shipped internationally. Spiritually, he was successful. Verse 25 tells us that three times a year he worshipped at the Temple.

Solomon had everything a king could want in life: money, property, possessions, servants, beautiful women. Yet every day he still had to make his spiritual choice. He still had to choose for God or against him. He couldn't rely on what he did for God yesterday. Would he be grateful for his money and use it for the right things? Would he use his power to help the poor and protect the weak? Would he give all the glory to God or swell up with pride? Philip Ryken warns us about the lure of idolatry: "The more we have of what this world has to offer, the easier it is to think that we are on the right track, even when we are wandering down the road to idolatry."

We can get everything we want out of this life and still end up losing if we choose our own road instead of God's road. Unless we put God first in everything, we are heading towards disaster. This truth is also a comfort in every failure. No matter how bad things have gone, even as the result of our own mistakes, we still have a chance to choose for God. He is the God of second chances!

Every day we face the same choice as Solomon—the choice of daily obedience. What we did for God yesterday will not answer the demand he places on us today. I am not talking about salvation. I am talking about following him today and not trusting in something we did for God in the past. Even after 20 years

of spiritual success, Solomon could not afford to coast in the Christian life, and you can't afford to either.

Choosing the Right Spiritual Road

God came to Solomon a second time in a dream and lovingly warns him again. If you choose the right spiritual road, then I will continue to bless you. The bad news is that none of us choose the right road every time! We will often fail and make the wrong choice. That is why we have a Savior, Jesus Christ. He has always made the right choice in life. He has followed the road less traveled and the narrow road all the way to the cross. Jesus made the right choice as a child by learning obedience. He made the right choice when he was attacked by the devil in the wilderness. He had to make the right choice again when he was alone with his Father in the garden, wondering if there might be a way other than crucifixion.

Jesus chose for God. He chose for God every moment of every day, even when it cost him his life. Because Jesus was the only person who ever did choose for God all the time, he was able to make perfect atonement for our sins. Jesus is the road to God and the way to eternal life. If we trust him, his right choices count for us, even when we make the wrong choice. That's the good news!

The third and final lesson we learn from Solomon is: What matters most in life, no matter what else we achieve, is choosing the right spiritual road. If you are not a follower of Jesus Christ this morning, would you choose to follow him today? Don't be a fool like Solomon and go after all this world has to offer. It's been done before. Jesus himself said, *"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"* (Mark 8:35)

If you are a follower of Jesus, every day we are faced with the choice to choose for God. When we struggle with making the right choice, Jesus is always there, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to keep us on the road less traveled, the road that leads to life. Like Solomon, the Spirit of God often will warn us when we begin down the wrong path. Let me give you some practical ideas of how this looks.

How do we choose for God this week? We choose for God by reading his Word consistently. We choose for God by going to him in prayer. We choose for God by studying hard in school and following his plan for our calling and career. We choose for God by being content with what we have. We choose for God by saying no to sin and yes to holiness. We choose for God by saying things like, "I'm sorry," "I forgive you," and "I love you." We choose for God by loving our spouses. We choose for God by spending time with our children. We choose for God in countless

small choices we make every day. We choose for God by putting him first in everything we do.

Pastor Chris Lyons, who is in his 80's, is a friend of mine and a person that I consider one of my mentors. Several years ago I asked him how he was able to finish strong in this life. How did he keep his marriage alive after 60 years? What was the secret to staying faithful to the Lord? I'll never forget what he told me. He said, "Rob, I don't know what I'll do tomorrow, but today I'll live for Jesus. Today I'll love my wife. Today I'll choose for God." That's the choice God gave Solomon and the choice he gives us every day.

Didn't Jesus say the same thing? *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own"* (Matt. 6:33).

We have to choose for God every moment of every day.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1379-8N