

Pathway to blessing– 18/02/2018

“Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:14-15

Beloved in the Lord,

A seeker once asked a Godly man “How does one become holy?” The reply surprised him: “Two words”. “And they are?” “Right choices.” The seeker was intrigued and so he asked: “How does one learn to make right choices in life?” The reply was “One word. “And that is?” “Growth” was the reply. “Ok, how does one grow?” asked the seeker. The old man replied “two words.” “and they are?” “Wrong choices.”

This simple conversation contains a great deal of truth. We grow when we learn from our mistakes. When we have made a bad choice, or a wrong choice, and we are given the opportunity to do it again, then if we are wise, we make a good choice.

A few weeks ago Linda and I had an interesting experience. We offered to help Krista move into her new apartment. The new apartment is part of a larger complex that has several towers of apartments. We followed the sign into the loading dock which is in the basement of the complex. We parked the car and went in search of the elevator which would take us to her apartment. Krista’s partner Alex and his mother were there as well. We were told by the concierge that the elevator doors would be locked open for us to be able to load our things. We couldn’t see a sign for her building, but just near where we parked there was an elevator standing open. We proceeded to load all the stuff and when that was done we tried to go up. Something didn’t seem right as the elevator didn’t have a button for the second floor. Nevertheless there we were trying to get it to move, but nothing was happening. Upon closer investigation Krista seemed to think their building was the one across the way. We were worried about leaving things in the elevator in case the doors closed. Alex went to ask someone. To cut a long story short, we were in the wrong elevator and the one we needed was on the other side of the loading dock, and that too had the doors open. So we moved all the stuff across and it all ended well. If we ever have to take more things we will not make the same mistake again. The lesson we also learned was to make sure that you have the right elevator and that you are in the right building before unloading the car.

I think everyone in our household has at least once hopped onto a train at Town Hall or Central without checking the board, assuming that it will stop at Strathfield, because they usually do. There are however, some trains that are express to Parramatta and do not stop at Strathfield. By the time you realise this it is too late. I always make a point of checking the board before I get on the train just to be doubly sure.

Choices we make always have consequences, and that is why it is best to weigh up a situation and to check things out before acting. We find this principle taught in the Bible. Jesus said:

“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.” Luke 14:28-32

This teaching is self-explanatory, or at least it should be. The problem is that many in our society today, do not take this teaching to heart. Many people act rashly on an impulse, without weighing up the consequences. That is why we have so many problems in society.

Our text today is one of my favourite passages in the Old Testament. Joshua is about to lead the people into the Promised Land and he tells them that they must choose whom they will serve. He then says: ***“but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”***

This was not just a nice spiritual statement, but a decision forged in experience. As a young lad, Joshua was taken under Moses wing and he served Moses in the Tabernacle. Being so close to Moses he learnt a lot about Almighty God and he understood that God is Holy and serving Him requires dedication and discipline. It was serious business, but the blessings that come from serving God make it all worthwhile. Joshua knew that keeping close to God, staying on the path of blessing was not easy. He knew that the pathway to blessing is obedience.

He was an eyewitness on the occasions the people rose up and disobeyed God, and He saw the punishments that God meted out. Together with Caleb, they were the only ones of their generation to go into the Promised Land. All the others died in the wilderness due to their disobedience. They chose the right path against all the odds.

Today is the First Sunday in Lent. Lent is a good time to pause and to reflect upon one’s spiritual health. A time to assess the path we are on and to see where it is heading. This time of Lent is an ideal time for some self-examination.

I go to the dental clinic twice a year for a check-up and polish. By doing this I avoid problems I had when I didn’t go regularly. A regular six monthly check-up helps stay on top of things. If there is a cavity, it can be repaired with a simple filling, as opposed to an expensive and painful root canal if left undetected and untreated.

Many people have regular blood tests and a physical once a year to keep an eye on their health. Our physical well-being is important, but so too our spiritual. That also needs a regular check-up.

It is good to take stock from time to time. Ask yourself: Am I growing in my faith? Am I closer to God now than six months ago? Does my life reflect God more and more? Do I love God and my neighbour as I love myself? What lies behind the choices I make? Am I motivated by my own will and desires or a desire to serve God and to faithfully do His will? Am I aiming to please men or God? Is my will more important than God's will? This type of examination of one self will uncover what needs to be rectified. I know from my own experience that this is vital. It is so easy to get off the pathway to blessing and to drift with the world. The pathway to blessing is narrow and hard to stay on.

Not only do we have to battle with our own sinful desires, but we also have to battle the devil who is always looking to trip us up. The moment you decide to grow and walk closer with the Lord, you will be tested. You will come under pressure from within and without. Jesus experienced this. The day of His baptism was the beginning of His public ministry. Up until that time Jesus worked with Joseph as a carpenter. At the age of 30 He was baptised by John in the Jordan river. This started a ministry that spanned 3.5 years which involved teaching, preaching, healing, miracles, mentoring....

At His Baptism, Jesus publicly surrendered to the Father and to the work that He had to do. What was the first thing that happened after He was baptised? He was led by The Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days and nights. The Devil hit Him hard. Jesus withstood all the temptations because He relied not upon Himself, but upon God The Holy Spirit. He replied to each temptation by quoting God's Word. Jesus did not rely upon Himself, but upon God. In so doing, He gave us the perfect example of what we must do.

When we decide to grow in our faith, then we can be sure Satan will arrive and he will come punching. You decide to spend more time reading the Bible. The moment you sit down to do so, you will think of ten different things you want or need to do. At this point you are in the critical moment of decision. Your decision will determine whether you are blessed or not. With time and experience it does become a little easier, because you know that time spent with God and His Word is time well spent.

Martin Luther liked to say: "I have so much to do today, that I have to spend the first few hours in prayer and study of God's Word." He found that investing time in God's Word energised Him for the day.

As we enter Lent, may we use this time to grow in our faith. May we choose the pathway to blessing. May we like Joshua proclaim: ***"but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."***

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