

Choosing Christ

Lachlan Perrin

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Treasure in heaven

In today's pastoral meditation we are focusing on what it means to *choose* Jesus Christ. In Matthew Chapter 6, Jesus highlighted that our choices in life, which are evidenced by our conduct, priorities and lifestyle, reveal the nature of our heart. He said, 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' Luk 12:34. Jesus identified two kinds of treasure: the temporal, or passing, treasures of the world; and the eternal treasures of heaven. He said, 'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.' Mat 6:19-20. If our mind is darkened and set on the flesh, then our heart treasures the things of the world. If our mind is illuminated and set on the Spirit, then our heart treasures eternal life and peace with God. Today, the Lord is reminding us that we cannot pursue *both* kinds of treasure. Gal 5:17. They are mutually exclusive, and the word of the cross calls us to choose one or the other. 2Co 6:14.

'Heavenly treasure' is the divine nature; the eternal life of God that was made available for sons of men through the shedding of Christ's blood. We choose this treasure by hearing, receiving and walking in faith-obedience to the communion word that is proclaimed by Christ's messengers. This word is the light of the gospel of sonship; the light of the knowledge of the glory of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. 2Co 4:6. The word of the cross grants us faith to join the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. And, as those who are illuminated in their spirit, we are able to see and understand every circumstance of our life as being our participation in Christ's offering journey. As we join the fellowship of Christ's death, by faith, the *exanastasis* life that is in His blood is manifested in our mortal bodies. 2Co 4:10. The apostle Paul summarised the outcome of abiding in Christ and thereby receiving the life of God when he said, 'We have this *treasure* [the divine nature] in earthen vessels [our mortal body].' 2Co 4:7.

In contrast, 'treasures on earth' refers to the passing pleasures of the world that satisfy the desires of our flesh. This includes the alternate 'gospels' and religious activities that we adhere to because we think that they validate our perspective of Christianity. Unless our theological beliefs and religious practices are the outcome of illumination, which is ministered in the word of present truth, our interpretation of faith remains a darkness. Pursuing the treasures of the world progressively deceives us. While we mistakenly believe that we are becoming rich, we are, in fact, becoming *empty*. Rev 3:17. Jer 2:5. Jesus highlighted this point when He taught the parable of the sower. He likened the heart of a son of God to thorny ground if the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, causing him to become unfruitful. Mat 13:22. The key point is that treasures in heaven, which grow from the seed of the word, and treasures on earth, which grow like thorns, cannot grow together!

After instructing His disciples to lay up treasures in heaven, Jesus proceeded to say, 'No-one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to [lit. cleave or 'hold fast to'] the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.' Mat 6:24. The word, 'mammon', which can also be translated as 'wealth', is derived from a Greek word that refers to the personification of anything that we esteem as more valuable than God. It's the notions of 'wealth' that we imagine, which are outside of God's will, or sanctification, for us. To serve mammon is to pursue security, control and self-confidence in life through the strength of our flesh. But when we serve the agendas of our flesh, we cannot reveal the righteousness of God; nor can we mature in or produce the fruit of our sonship.

The book of Hebrews further reminds us to seek the treasure of eternal life, rather than the fading treasures of this world. We read, 'We have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come'. Heb 13:14. Today, we are considering how this choice is demonstrated in the culture of a son of God. For many, this season has been particularly fruitful. Now, the Lord is reminding us that salvation is not based upon constantly adding. Isa 5:8. Instead, salvation is based upon constantly *turning*. Heb 6:1. For some, the Lord is asking you to serve Him and Him only. He is ministering grace to see you delivered from the distraction of the worldly treasures that only serve to choke the word of life. For others, the Lord is asking you to let go of past experiences that you have turned away from, but continue to hold on to.

Over the recent weeks, the Lord has been ministering grace for us to find closure on various matters. These have included personal views of the gospel, which we have unhelpfully carried with us, constantly trying to hybridise the word of present truth with these old 'gospels'. Other matters have included family cultures and habits, familiar perspectives and lame responses, which only undermine the work of the cross in our homes. Most of these matters have stemmed from past events or relationships. Today, the Lord is reminding us that the past is where these things belong. As the Spirit meets us today, bringing illumination and confirmation concerning these points in our history, it's time for us to let go of the things which lie behind us. The things of the past belong in the past. And, finally, the things that we won't let go of, won't let go of *us*.

The nature of choice

When the word of the cross is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit pours out a spirit of grace and supplication, enabling a hearer to believe the word and to mourn for Christ whom they have pierced. Zec 12:10. The Bible describes this kind of mourning as 'godly sorrow', which produces 'repentance without regret, leading to salvation'. 2Co 7:10. In other words, the gospel blesses us with faith to turn to Christ in repentance. 'Choice', for a son of God, is our decision, by faith, to abide in Christ and among His people, rejecting every worldly alternative to the way of the cross that Christ has prepared for us. We are choosing to esteem the fellowship of Christ's sufferings as greater riches than the treasures of the world. Heb 11:26. Choice is our repentant turning to Christ. And, just as life is full of choices, the Christian life is a life full of continual repentance.

The book of Hebrews identifies repentance from dead works as one of the foundations of salvation. Heb 6:1. Repentance *continues* to be a foundation for us when we walk by faith in the fellowship of the word of present truth. The key point is that salvation is not guaranteed through a born-again experience. We recall, from the book of Revelation, that the presbyters in

the church in Ephesus were born of God and were committed to toiling and persevering for Christ. Rev 2:2. However, the Lord rebuked them for failing to keep repentance as the foundational culture in their church. They had fallen from first love and were in danger of losing their connection to Christ's administration of lampstand churches. Jesus said that repentance was the first step on the pathway of their recovery. Rev 2:5. If they would recommit to a foundation of repentance, they could be restored.

Repentance involves turning to Christ *and* renouncing the hidden things of shame. 2Co 4:2. The 'hidden things of shame' are perspectives and practices that are motivated by our other law. When we testify about repentance, our testimony should have two elements. It will include our testimony of the place of participation in Christ that we have seen by illumination, and have chosen to turn *to*. And it should also include the testimony of the fallen cultures and practices that we have chosen to turn *from*.

Hence, the evidence that we have received the illumination of faith will be *more* than our choice to turn in repentance. It is our choice to *leave behind* those things that we have turned away from. The apostle Paul testified, 'I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, *forgetting those things which are behind* and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.' Php 3:12-14. Interestingly, we note that the 'one thing' Paul did involved two actions! Reaching forward to the things that lie ahead requires us to *forget* those things which are behind.

When Paul wrote to the Hebrews, he referred to the examples of the patriarchs of faith for our instruction. We read in Chapter 11, 'These all died in faith ... and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now, they desire a better, that is, a heavenly.' Heb 11:13-16. The literal translation of verse fifteen is, 'And truly *if they remembered* that from which they came out, they had time to return'. The patriarchs demonstrated faith through their commitment to follow the Lord. The Scripture accounts that, as they did this, they could not remember, or 'call to mind', the cultures, customs and foreign gods that they had chosen to leave behind.

The faith of Abraham

Three weeks ago, we considered the faith of Abraham, who, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. Heb 11:8. In this first interaction with the Lord, the God of glory blessed Abraham with the promise of sonship and of the Spirit. As Abraham departed Haran in the land of Canaan, the power of the Spirit of God was upon him. Following Abraham's example, we learnt that closure, for a son of God, is not found through our perspectives of what resolution and restitution should look like. Rather, abiding in the fellowship of Christ's offering, by faith, brings an end to the matters that trouble us. As Abraham continually chose to journey with the Lord, by faith, he was kept by the Spirit of God.

In Genesis Chapter 14, we read about Abraham's second encounter with the Lord. We recall that Abraham defeated the four kings who had conquered five other kings and had taken his

nephew, Lot, captive. When Abraham returned from this slaughter of the kings, Christ met him as Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham and brought out bread and wine, which symbolised the life of Christ in His body and blood. The ministry of Jesus Christ, as our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, is to share His life with us by offering. Abraham appropriated the blessing of God, which is the life of Christ, as he ate and drank the communion with Melchizedek. Abraham was given a participation in the life and fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Interestingly, in this interaction between Melchizedek and Abraham, the king of Sodom was also present. The Scripture accounts that the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord. Gen 13:13. The king of Sodom represented the spirit of rulership that was at work in the world, which opposes godliness and rejects the authority of God. Eph 2:2. The king of Sodom's rulership was after the working of Satan, whom Jesus identified as the ruler of the world. Joh 12:31. In this month's devotions, we are considering the parable of the sower. And in the communion meal that Melchizedek shared with Abraham, we can identify how Abraham guarded his heart from becoming 'wayside', 'stony' or 'thorny' ground.

'So he [Abraham] brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people. And *the king of Sodom went out to meet him* at the Valley of Shaveh) that is, the King's Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him. *Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said:*

' "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand."

'And he gave him a tithe of all. Now *the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself."* But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, "That I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich' ". ' Gen 14:16-23

Following the communion meal, the king of Sodom sought to 'feed' Abraham with an alternative word. We recall that Satan deceived Eve with an alternative word in the garden of Eden, which encouraged her to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When the king of Sodom said, 'Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself', he revealed the same *trading* nature for which Satan was cast profane from heaven. Eze 28:16. We also note that he asked for the *people*. The apostle Peter said, 'Your adversary the Devil walks about like a roaring lion, *seeking someone he may devour.*' 1Pe 5:8.

The king of Sodom could not 'pluck the seed of the communion word' from Abraham's heart, because Abraham had received *illumination*. His interaction with Melchizedek enabled him to see and to believe in the kingdom of God, which was demonstrated by his offering of a tithe. Abraham further demonstrated his understanding, and faith, when he responded to the king of Sodom by acknowledging that the Lord is 'God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth'. The tithe that Abraham offered was representative of his understanding that God is the Possessor of all.

When Abraham responded to the king of Sodom, he said, 'I have raised my hand to the Lord.' The raising of the right hand to the Lord was a customary Hebrew gesture that accompanied the swearing of an oath. In this action, Abraham was demonstrating his desire to participate in the Everlasting Covenant of God. He was revealing his desire to join his life, by faith, to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. He understood that the Everlasting Covenant purpose – for the life of God to be multiplied to the sons of men – would be fulfilled through Christ's offering. Abraham's willingness to suffer with Christ and to not draw back from tribulation or persecution revealed that his heart was not 'stony'.

Furthermore, when Abraham declared, 'I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, "I have made Abram rich" ', he demonstrated that he was guarding his heart from the deceitfulness of worldly riches. The faith that Abraham received in the communion meal caused him to understand that 'it is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich'. Pro 10:22. He refused even a thread, such was his resolve to remain undefiled by anything belonging to Sodom. From Melchizedek, however, he gladly chose to receive the fellowship of the bread and wine. Every week, the world, operating after the working of Satan, entices us to exchange life and fellowship for the treasures and pleasures of worldliness. As we, instead, participate in the communion, we are strengthened by grace to say, 'I have sworn to the Lord, rightful Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will choose my sanctification.'

'Lord, I've Chosen You'

When we sing the song, 'Lord, I've Chosen You', we are confessing that we have received faith to choose the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Without faith, we will not choose the message of the cross. It appears as foolishness to the unenlightened. 'Lord, I've Chosen You' is based upon the passages found in the book of Hebrews that speak to us about the faith of Moses. 'By faith Moses, when he became of age, *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.' Heb 11:24-26. Moses '*looked* to the reward' because he received illumination, and believed for his inclusion in the kingdom of God. The same word that ministered faith to him also set the hope of eternal life before him. By faith, Moses chose the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, where the treasure of God's life abounds, rather than the riches of the world.

The Greek word that has been translated as 'refused' in the above verse can also be translated as 'deny'. It is the same word that was used when Jesus said, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him *deny* himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.' Luk 9:23. To 'deny ourselves' is to stop appraising life according to the responses of our flesh. This requires us to cease from cleaving to the experiences of our past, for which the Lord is ministering grace so that we can truly turn away and leave them behind. Throughout this season, the word has been ministering faith to us so that we can make this choice. Alternatively, when we choose to hold on to the conclusions that our flesh has made concerning past hurts, regrets and points of adversity, we are choosing to suffer outside of Christ. This removes us from the context where grace is available. And we are left wondering how to 'let go' of our troubles.

The Lord is ministering deliverance today. He is asking us to choose the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, rather than the deception of riches offered by the world. His word is granting us the same faith as Ruth, which was the faith of the Son. Ruth declared, 'Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die.' Rut 1:16-17. This is the testimony of choosing Christ, of which we are being reminded today.