

## 2023 Deut 30 God's Decision

Let's imagine you are sitting in the audience of the Price is Right! Enjoying the game show. But then, how amazing, Bob Barker calls your name! "Come on down!" You get a little intro and off you go to the podium, and, as luck or skill would have it, you nail the price on a washer/dryer combo and now your up on stage spinning wheels, playing mini games, and the whole thing. And you do great, so great that you get to choose your own reward. So, behind door number one is a two week vacation to paradise. All expenses paid, resort living. Ah, wonderful. And what's behind door number 2, maybe it will be a new car or something. Door number 2 opens and you get the chance to choose... a trip to jury duty. To a root canal. You get a rusty boat with a hole in it. Taxes and fees apply.

Is that a hard choice? I don't think it is. I think we are taking the vacation every time. No questions asked. You'd be stupid not to.

And in our Old Testament reading the people of God are given a choice. The promised land across the Jordan, a place to call your own, to live in, to thrive in, to put down roots, with protection on every side from their enemies. Finally an end to the life in tents.

And behind door number 2 (a real tough choice here): death. Go through that door and you fall off a cliff, you meet darkness, pain, loss.

Is that a real difficult decision? Not at all. It's the easiest decision ever!

And we good Lutherans get a little anxiety – “wait, is this works/righteousness? it sounds like they are earning the promised land here. They are making their decision for God.”

But lets remember the history of Israel in the promised land. How does it go for them? What do they wind up choosing eventually? And then again, and again, and again. They choose idols, they choose to ignore God and his ways. And, let alone the just punishment from the Lord that brings. There is also a simple reality: Only God can save. God doesn't say “Worship me alone” because he is a narcissist. It's because he is the life-giver, to depart from him is to go unto death with no strong arm to save.

And so this reading I may be so bold to say, is perfect evidence *against* works/righteousness. It is yet another example that if anything is left up to us – we will screw it up.

And I say “we” there intentionally. Because, while we aren't chasing after other idols, we are here worshiping the True God and Savior – God be praised for that, literally. Do we not make some dumb decisions too? And we try, again, to weasel out of it, “Well its not like I'm bowing down to a block of wood.” True enough. How's your relationship with money? Or sexuality? Or greed? Or pride? Or anger?

Or resentment? Or His Word, especially when compared to the opinions of society? No compromises anywhere there? Right. And we are pastors, we are supposed to be mature, able to take the meat of Christian teaching and life. Yet, you heard that sermon on the mount, no one is getting off scott free from that. No one.

Jesus does not pull any punches. He turns that law all the way up. And no one is left standing. We are all brought low and we can't blame our parents, or society, or stress, nope. No one is left standing. Your fault, your own stupid fault and choices. We ought to be plucking out eyes and lopping off limbs left and right if we understood the gravity of our fallenness and what we deserve because of it.

And God then looks at you and all the decisions you've made. He looks at you and your bad choices. And he says, "You know what? I still love them. I still want them to be my own. I will give my all for them." And do you not see this throughout Israel's history as well, as he continually remembers his people and works to save them. And the devil and maybe we say, "That's a stupid choice, they aren't worth it." Yet God said for them, for you, "Yes they are."

And so he leaves the mount where he gives a sermon, and would go to the mount of calvary and die for your sin and mine. He would die for your apathy, your lust, your hatred, your lies. That you might be with him, risen victorious over the grave,

in the greater promised land where nothing will ever hurt you again – not even your own dumb choices.

And there, washed clean, and among God's people, will there not be peace and righteousness and full forgiveness? Which means, will there not be therefore.. joy and celebration?

Our reading today isn't works/righteousness. It is speaking of the reality of the joys and blessings of obedience to God's word. But it is also pointing out the fact that God chooses us to be his people. It's undeserved, it's crazy, it seems like such a bad choice, but it's a beautiful choosing. And if you doubt that you are his chosen one, consider the callings he has given you, in water, in word. Those aren't accidents. They are promises from God, to you, sealed in the blood of Jesus.

Amen.