

“Will that be Paper or Plastic?” (Choosing Wisely in Life’s Decisions)

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Scripture: 1 Kings 3:3-14

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Introduction –

A group of friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night one of the hunters returned alone, staggering under an eight-point buck.

"Where's Harry?" he was asked.

"Harry had a bad fall and broke his leg in multiple places. He's a couple of miles back up the trail."

"You left Harry laying there, and carried the deer back?"

"Well," said the hunter, "I figured no one was going to steal Harry."

Hey, the hunter made the best decision he could. Have you ever thought about how many decisions we have to make on an everyday basis? Think about it. Just in the course of an average day. We wake up after having decided what time to set the alarm clock for, we decide whether to bath or shower (or do neither), and we decide what to eat for breakfast and what to wear, etc. Without much conscious thought our minds process a number of decisions that guide the course of our day.

Then there are those decisions that slow us down for a moment; such as the one that I have chosen to name my sermon after today... “Will that be paper or plastic?” We all know the situation. You are standing at the cashier’s counter and he or she asks you the question that every shopper dreads. Oh, it seems like a simple question but on a deeper surface our values and priorities are being called into question. *For, the words of Eleanor Roosevelt*

ring true: One's philosophy is not best expressed in words. It is expressed in the choices one makes.

The real question is what do you care about most...the fact that there are millions of non-biodegradable plastic bags in landfills or that millions of trees are cut down each day to supply the paper industry. How do you answer questions that cause you to evaluate what matters most to you? In the bible passage read today, we see how King Solomon responded such a question...

Historic Background

1 Kings, chapter 3 recounts an epiphany experienced by King Solomon while he was seated on the throne. We all know the story of King Solomon. He succeeded his father David to rule over the chosen people of Israel in response to the covenant God made with David to establish his throne forever.

The political climate then was not very different from now. Kings made alliances with other kings to secure the future of their domains. Back then marriages were often arranged among kings whereas now the trades may be weapons or military support. Favors were often traded both in public and in private and kingship was clearly not a job for the faint hearted. The more alliances a king held meant the more powerful he was. Therefore, the fact that Solomon had a covenant with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was of up most importance.

In the passage, God visits Solomon in a dream and asks him what it is that God can give him. Could you imagine? God basically wrote Solomon a blank check and told him to fill it in. Now remember, Solomon ruled during a time when power and influence were important. He could have asked for

extreme wealth in order to buy whatever his kingdom needed. Or, he could have asked for military might to ensure that Israel would win every future battle. Perhaps, he could have asked for popularity, intellect, prestige or a whole host of other things but Solomon did not. See, in reality, this was a paper or plastic question. It was a question that would easily assess Solomon's values and priorities by his response.

Lesson

So, how did Solomon respond? He chose God. Solomon chose not to use the world's methods of success but to depend upon the one who had established his kingship in the first place. First, Solomon thanks God for the covenant that God established with David and lets God know that he too would like to continue in that covenant. By calling himself a little child, Solomon is not speaking literally but is expressing humility and his desire to be a servant of God through his kingship. Finally, Solomon asks for a discerning heart, typically we hear it described as wisdom that Solomon asked for. But it goes a little deeper that.

The Hebrew used here literally means a listening or obedient heart. It is an active phrase. It means that Solomon does not want God to just deposit a collection of facts into his head but that he wants to have an open connection to God. He wants God to direct him on a daily basis and for Solomon's heart to be open and obedient to what God says. Solomon recognized that it is not about WHAT you know but WHO you know. By having a strong relationship and covenant with God, Solomon's values and priorities would always be in order and his choices would always be good choices when made through his relationship with God.

God was pleased with Solomon's choice and granted him not only his request but many things that he did not request as well. For as God promises, when we seek first God and his kingdom, God gives us everything else we need as well.

Application

The same is true for us today. God has placed a blank check before each one of us called life. The bible tells us many times that God invites us to come before his presence in prayer and request whatever it is that we need. How should we make choices that call into question our values? The answer is, according to King Solomon, we make them by having a relationship and ongoing communication with God.

Young people, as you head back to school tomorrow and throughout August and September for college students, you will be faced with many choices. You could choose popularity so that you fit in with other students and the "in crowd", you could choose physical prowess so that you excel in sports or physical beauty so that you catch the opposite sex's eye, you could choose supreme intellect so that no one can achieve higher than you in any class. But I hope that you will choose otherwise, that you too will ask God for an open and obedient heart so that God can guide you through the tasks that God has laid before you. When you sincerely do this and allow God to establish your values, God will give you everything else that you need for school and life.

The same is true for us adults. On our jobs, in our homes, in our social circles, what will we choose? Will we continue to play the political game and make our own alliances or will we depend upon God to help us with the

tasks before us. Will we try to keep up with the Joneses or will we allow Christ to be our example? What will we trust in more, our networking lunches and golf green transactions, our intellect and lists of books read, our long list of friends and acquaintances, investments and achievements or God (the one who has made us who we are today and has established an everlasting covenant with us as his children). Believe me, as a doctoral student at Gordon Conwell Theological School, I know what it is like to have to make a conscious decision to depend upon God and not on my own understanding. It is easy to be deceived and think that we can take credit for where we are and who we are in life.

Today my brothers and sisters in Christ, God wants us to follow the example of a wonderful king. Solomon was by no means perfect. We all know about his shortcomings. But, when it mattered most, Solomon chose wisely. He chose to depend upon God.

Lord, we recognize that you have laid before us a blank check, for you said that whatever we ask for in prayer, believing in our hearts, that we should receive it. So, today we ask for listening and obedient hearts to fulfill the tasks that you have laid before each one of us. And in the words of John Calvin, Help us to see you in the moment-by-moment possibilities to live honestly, to act courageously, and to speak from our wisdom. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.