

May 7, 1967  
Joshua 24:13-17  
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### THE CHOICE

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve."  
Joshua 24:15

In these days when we are hearing so much about juvenile delinquency, teen-age crime, student demonstrations and many other derogatory things about young people, Mr. Asher and I are proud to receive these 41 new church members.

They are good young people. We are happy to welcome them. We urge you not to judge or condemn them merely because they are young. They, no doubt, would answer, as did that young man whose father congratulated him when he reached his 13th birthday and asked how it felt to be a teen-ager. He replied, "It's all right, I guess, except for the reputation."

When I hear teen-agers criticized en masse, I often think of what Charles Eliot once said. "In the eyes of God, human beings must all seem very young." So I would urge you not to judge these young people, nor any group of people, as a class. Such judgments are always unfair and unjust. If you judge teen-agers individually, you will discover that you can be very proud of the great majority of them.

With all the so-called advantages that these young people have today, with all the temptations they confront which you and I never had to confront in quite the same manner, I am of the conviction that today's young people have to be twice as strong as we were in order to turn out half as well. Most of them are turning out just a little bit better because of all they have had to confront and overcome. When I think of some of the examples they have had set before them, the Bobby Bakers, Adam Clayton Powells and Mohammed Alis, I wonder that they turn out as well as they do.

### II

But enough of that. These 41 new church members don't need defending. I have said enough to you about them; now I want to talk to them about their future, and I want to do it by talking about a man who lived approximately 5,000 years ago and whose name was Joshua.

You will remember, I hope, that Joshua became the leader of the Hebrew people after Moses had led them out of slavery in Egypt and through 40 years of wilderness wandering. Moses died on the edge of the promised land and Joshua took the people into the land to claim the inheritance God had promised them, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Even though they now resided in the promised land, things were not always easy. When difficulties arose, the people were often tempted to give up their faith in God and put their faith in something else.

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On one such occasion, Joshua gathered all the people together and gave them a speech. He reminded them of all that they had gone through together, how God had led them through the Red Sea, how he had provided food in the desert, how he had given them the leadership of Moses and brought them safely to this new land. Then he concluded with these famous words:

"Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your father served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt; and serve the Lord.

"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

"You must choose", said Joshua. He was right. Life is one continual choice. You have made some significant choices already in these first 15 years of your life, but you will constantly be forced to make additional choices. Life will continually press upon you saying, "Choose, choose, choose."

This choice which you have recently made and which we recognize this morning is the most significant and important choice you will ever make. I don't mean the mere choice of becoming a member of the church. I refer to that which church membership signifies--the choice of Jesus Christ as your master and guide, and the Christian way of life as your philosophy. Nothing you will ever do the rest of your life is as important as that choice, for that choice, if it has been made sincerely and honestly, will largely determine every other important decision you will ever make. It will largely determine the kind of person you marry, the kind of work you choose as your life work, your happiness or your unhappiness, and finally your eternal destiny.

A friend visited a critically ill lawyer in a hospital one day, and much to his surprise, found this very sick lawyer frantically leafing through the Bible. "What are you doing?" the friend asked. And the lawyer replied, "Looking for loopholes."

My young friends, I wish I could convince you and every other young person in the world that there are no loopholes in this life which God has given us. This is a world of moral law and spiritual order.

One young man sincerely trying to decide what moral values to live by recently wrote me a letter in which he discussed the new morality and what is called situational ethics. He argued that sexual relations before marriage were permissible if the two persons involved loved each other.

Now you may not believe this, but you are going to be in love many times before you finally get married. To think you are in love is not an adequate excuse for sexual relations. Psychiatrists are telling us today that premarital sexual relations are the cause of a large

percentage of mental illness in later years. Health authorities are telling us that an improper use of sex is causing a big boost in venereal disease in this country. These are only two of the consequences of making this particular wrong choice. You must always pay the consequences, there are no loopholes. God never lets us get away with anything.

I have been very frank about this for two reasons. I think conditions being what they are today, we need to be frank about these things, and secondly, I think young people want adults to be frank and not to beat around the bush. Today's youth is too sophisticated to hear about the birds and the bees.

Several years ago I gave a talk to the Pilgrim Fellowship entitled "What I Learned from the Birds and the Bees." We had the year's best attendance that night. I told those young people at that time, however, that when it came to sex, I had never learned anything from the birds and the bees. Young people want straight answers, and I for one believe in giving them straight answers. Life is too important and youth too short for us to play games about these matters of such central importance.

"Choose you this day whom you will serve." Will you serve the God of your fathers? Will you serve the God whom men have been following for 5,000 years--the God whose existence the whole physical universe and all the experience of mankind proclaims? Will you choose God and live by His laws? I promise you a miserable existence if you do not.

### III

Now it is important that you make the choice and not let others make it for you. Would you willingly let someone else choose the man or woman you one day will marry? Would you willingly let someone else choose the kind of work you must do the rest of your life? We Americans have rejected the kind of society in which these choices are made for us.

On the other hand, there are people who do let others choose their life philosophy for them. Why do they do that? Because they are too weak to say no, they are too weak not to conform, they are not strong enough to be leaders and prefer rather to be followers. They have no strong beliefs, such as I spoke of last Sunday when I urged every Christian to commit himself and finally come to say, "This I believe, this I will live by, and if necessary, this I will die for." Do you believe anything that strongly? If not, I fear for your future and for the future of our country.

### IV

I have spoken about the first and most important choice of your life--your life philosophy--and I have urged you to follow the examples of Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Let me now speak very briefly about one other important choice. It is the choice of a life mate. This may seem a long way off to you, but for some of you it will come within the next five years, and for all of you, very likely, within the next seven or eight years, and that's not a very long time. Referring once more to sex habits, let me assure you that we usually marry the kind of person we deserve. Here is some of the best advice I can give you--be the kind of person physically, morally and spiritually, you will one day want to marry.

Love is something you smile about at your age and we all make jokes about, like the father who listened to his son at the wedding ceremony promise, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow." Remarked the father, "There goes his fraternity pin and stamp collection!"

Here is an anonymous poem that says that which often gives me some concern. It is spoken by a woman:

"At 20 I had fixed ideas about my Galahad,  
He must be handsome, blonde and tall  
A generous, carefree lad.

He must be witty, wise, yet young  
With charm and savoir-faire,  
And as was then my preference,  
He must have curly hair.

At thirty, much to my distress  
Alarmed at how time flies,  
I find myself most eager to  
Effect a compromise.

Men often have the same trouble. They fall in love with a dimple and marry the whole girl.

This is not the way to fall in love. As a matter of fact, I do not even like the word, "fall". Marriage is far too important to merely fall into. The health and welfare of our entire society depends upon the stability of marriage and the home. When you promise to love someone for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death parts you, I want you to mean it.

The choice you make at the time of marriage must be guided by those religious principles which you chose as your life philosophy. And those principles must guide your marriage through every day of your life.

V

Now I am afraid I have rambled a bit this morning and I wish I could talk to you for three more hours, but I am capable of talking far longer than you are capable of listening.

Let me conclude with a quotation. All of you have dreams, aims and goals. This is as it should be. Always ask yourself, however, if these dreams, aims and goals are worthy of a Christian. Then determine that you will never seek to achieve those goals by any other than Christian means. If the goal is worthy, if God can truly bless it, it is attainable. Here's the quotation. It is from William E. Holler:

"You can do what you want to do, accomplish what you want to accomplish, attain any reasonable objective you may have in mind... Not all of a sudden, perhaps, not in one swift and sweeping act of achievement. But you can do it gradually--day by day and play by play--if you want to do it, if you will to do it, if you work to do it, over a sufficiently long period of time."

May all of your choices and all your goals be acceptable in God's sight and worthy of His blessing, and may you never be unfaithful to the holy vows which you have taken this day.