

Choices

This evening, we're going to look at an all too common challenge to our walks- **choosing to Sin, choosing to Suffer.**

As far back as the Garden of Eden we have great examples of this challenge. Turn with me, if you will, to the book of **Genesis, Chapter 2**. We all know the story- Adam is in the Garden, and God had told him the only tree he shall not eat of was the Tree of The Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Keep in mind, God doesn't tell us **not** to do something because He is a killjoy, nor is He trying to ruin our "fun." He tells us **not** to do something because He knows what's best for us, and He doesn't want us to hurt ourselves. So here we are- verse 15:

Gen 2:15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

Gen 2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

Gen 2:17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Sounds pretty straightforward and simple, doesn't it?

Folks, take a second and look up here, at me, please. Manmy of you will boast about your marriage, but Dawn and I have the best marriage in that she loves to cook, and I love to eat! Now I know you can't tell by just looking at me, but I have the wonderful blessing of being able to eat huge amounts of almost anything. As an example of my wonderful blessing, one evening early in our marriage, my beautiful bride prepared a pound of homemade three cheese, macaroni & cheese for dinner! It was a delicious meal, but part way through it she made the comment we would have leftovers, because there was no way we were going to finish the mac & cheese at this sitting. Well, let me tell you- there were no leftovers that night! I sat there and ate the remaining 3/4 pounds of her delicious, homemade three cheese, mac & cheese and five sausages all in one sitting! Afterwards, I was still hungry. So I topped it off with something else- I think it was a big bowl of ice cream, or something- and I **still** wasn't full!! She was stunned and amazed at how much I could pack away, and wonders to this day where I

put it all! (I pat both my legs and tell her they are hollow, which is why I can eat so much- it never gets up to my stomach!) Anyway, telling Adam of the tree in the Garden would be like Dawn making a feast for me, fit for royalty, and saying "you can have *anything* you see, **except** this particular dish, which you have never had before." I don't know what it is, and I've never had it before, so it isn't something I crave or will miss. But it sure *looks* good, *smells* delicious, and *might* good for me. Pretty straightforward and simple right? Let's see.

According to the account, Eve was tempted by Satan in the Garden. Genesis chapter 3, starting with verse 1:

Gen 3:1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

Gen 3:2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;

Gen 3:3 but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

Gen 3:4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.

Gen 3:5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Gen 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

They both knew this was wrong. Yet they both **chose** to take and eat of the fruit.

In his commentary, Matthew Henry writes: (quote) "Note, when there is thought to be no more harm in forbidden fruit than in other fruit sin lies at the door, and Satan soon carries the day." (end-quote).

Eve took and ate, because she was deceived-Eve was the weaker vessel, so we cut her a little break. And, according to the text, she didn't have her facts straight anyway.

Look, again, at verses 2 & 3:

Gen 3:2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the

fruit of the trees of the garden; This is correct information.

Gen 3:3 but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

That is *not* what God told them. There is nothing to suggest, in the text, that they could not *touch* it- simply that they could not *eat of it*. If I had a bottle of Cyanide in front of me you can touch it all you want- but don't drink it! It is harmless to handle but deadly to ingest.

Now, I'm not here tonight to bash Adam; why he took and ate is anybody's guess. But it seems to me- and this is just my opinion which amounts to less than nothing, but it seems to me his wife had him wrapped around her little finger, very well, if she told him to eat, and he did what she told him to do, with a simple "yes, dear"! See, I'm learning about this marriage thing! (laugh)

Someday, we may get the opportunity to get his side of the story. Until then, we can see the result of their choice to eat of the fruit, in the following verses:

Gen 3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

Now I don't know, from personal experience, but I have heard that fig leaves are very rough, and very scratchy. I certainly wouldn't want to have those fig leaves covering *my* sensitive skin! I can only imagine how uncomfortable Adam and Eve felt. But, they chose to sin, they chose to suffer. Unfortunately, it doesn't end there- it actually gets worse. Look at Genesis 3, verse 24:

Gen 3:24 So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

So, they were forced out of the only home they knew, and had to face life ahead, outside of the relationship they shared with God in the garden. I believe they suffered *immediate* spiritual death (and eventually physical death as well).

I believe the Garden of Eden represented the unique, intimate relationship God wants to have with each one of us.

Turn with me, now, to the book of **Acts, chapter 5**, and let's look at another husband/ wife team, and see their example. Acts, chapter 5 starting with verse 1:

Act 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.

Act 5:2 And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware *of it*, and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

Act 5:3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself?"

Here again, we see Satan at work, deceiving Ananias into believing it was no big deal to keep back a portion of the sale price for this possession. Folks, one of the hardest lessons I have had to learn in my life is, "if it goes against God, it *is* a big deal!" Remember what happened when Korah and his gang went up against Moses in Numbers, chapter 16? The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up! That's a big deal! Another example? Look at our country and society today- I think that's enough said with that. Let's read on- Acts chapter 5, verse 4:

Act 5:4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

I think it's safe to say everyone in this room tonight has-at one time or another- told a lie, correct (raise hand)?? Yeah, and for those of you who didn't raise your hand, you just told a lie, so you're in the same boat as everyone else here! But, when you realized you told a lie, did it dawn on you that you had lied to the person, ***and*** to God? I think that should make us think twice about what we say to people, because if it isn't the truth it's a lie, and even a "little white lie" is still a lie. Tell the truth in love- don't tell a lie, as that not only brings disrespect to our Lord, but blows our witness once we're found out. And before you think "no one will know," let me remind you- God knows.

Back to our text:

Act 5:5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard

these things.

Act 5:6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

Okay, so we see Ananias did the deed, told the lie, got caught, and suffered death. Choose to Sin, choose to suffer.

Now how about Sapphira?

Act 5:7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

Act 5:8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."

Act 5:9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out."

Act 5:10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband.

She *did* know that she and her husband had kept back a portion of the proceeds. And she had *three hours* to do the right thing- to be upfront and honest. But she blew her chance to confess her wrongs. Her golden opportunity was present but she chose to sin- she lied and got caught also. we see both Ananias and Sapphira chose to sin, chose to suffer. They suffered immediate physical death.

Let's look at one more example. Turn with me to the book of **Mark, chapter 14**. And starting with **verse 27**, we read:

Mar 14:27 Then Jesus said to them, "**All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I WILL STRIKE THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP WILL BE SCATTERED.'**"

Mar 14:28 "**But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.**"

Mar 14:29 Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I *will not be*."

Mar 14:30 Jesus said to him, "**Assuredly, I say to you that today, *even this night*, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.**"

Mar 14:31 But he spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with

You, I will not deny You!" And they all said likewise.

That word, "vehemently"- According to **Webster** it is an adverb meaning "with great force and violence or urgently, forcibly, with great zeal or pathos."

Albert Barnes, in his commentary writes: "More vehemently - More earnestly, more confidently." This suggests to me arrogance and cockiness on Peter's part.

Now, you've got to love Peter- Jesus tells him he will be stumbled, and tells him he will deny Jesus, and how does Peter react? He tells Jesus He is wrong! "No Lord, I won't deny You. I won't stumble. You don't know me very well, Lord! Please!!"

Well, as we follow this story, we see that Jesus *did* know him, better than he knew himself. No surprise there- He knows all of us better than we know ourselves.

As Acts 15:8 tells us:

Act 15:8 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us

They are in the Garden of Gethsemane, the mob, led by Judas, has arrived and taken Jesus. Now look what it says in Mark 14, verse 50:

Mar 14:50 Then they all forsook Him and fled.

Tell me... what does "They all..." mean? (*they all*) It means Peter fled also. So much for his assurances he would stick by Jesus.

Peter must not have gone too far off, though, since the account tells of his following, "at a distance," (verse 54) but I believe he was far enough off that he wasn't noticed by the mob. Besides, I'm not sure the mob would have been interested in him, at that time, since they had the One they had come for.

Peter followed all the way to the courtyard, which is where we see him next. Mark, chapter 14, starting with verse 66:

Mar 14:66 Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came.

Mar 14:67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth."

Mar 14:68 But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying." And he went out on the

porch, and a rooster crowed.

Do you think he heard that rooster? What must have gone through his mind, do you think?

Mar 14:69 And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, "This is one of them."

Mar 14:70 But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are *one* of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows *it*."

Mar 14:71 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!"

Mar 14:72 A second time *the* rooster crowed. *Then* Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, "**Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.**" And when he thought about it, he wept.

It was only after the rooster crowed the *second* time, that Peter called to mind the Lord's words.

Now you may be asking, "Okay, Doug, but what does this have to do with the theme of your message?" Well, Peter *chose* to argue with Jesus, instead of realizing the Lord was trying to help him come to terms with his pride and arrogance. And Peter *chose* to deny the Lord, not once, not twice, but *three* times! Scripture does tell us: "pride goes before a fall." He *chose to sin*, by not believing, and he *chose to suffer* the humiliation of realizing the Lord was right, and he was, in fact, wrong. He denied the Lord three times. Try for a moment to imagine how he must have felt when the rooster crowed that second time, and *he heard it*. Scripture tells us "**he wept**" Matthew Henry, in his commentary writes: "He wept, and the more he thought of it, the more he wept; he continued weeping; he *flung out*, and wept; *burst out* into tears; *threw himself down*, and wept; he *covered his face*, and wept;"

The good news is Peter was restored. Look in the book of John, chapter 21, starting with verse 15:

Joh 21:15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?**" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "**Feed My lambs.**"

Joh 21:16 He said to him again a second time, "**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?**" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "**Tend My sheep.**"

Joh 21:17 He said to him the third time, "**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?**" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "**Do you love Me?**" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "**Feed My sheep.**"

Before I leave this as a study of the negative side of this, let's look another example of people who chose NOT to sin, and the rewards they received.

First, let's take a look at the three Hebrew children. Turn to Daniel, chapter 3. King Nebuchadnezzar had made the golden image, and had commanded that everyone bow down to it. Anyone who wouldn't bow down, would be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. At the appointed time, everyone did just that- bowed down to the golden image. That is, everyone except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. And of course, there are always those who make it their business to stick their nose into everyone else's business, and tell what they know in order to make themselves look better in another's eyes. Which is the case here. The three Hebrew children are called before Nebuchadnezzar, and questioned. Daniel 3:14-

Dan 3:14 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "***Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?***"

Dan 3:15 Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, ***and*** psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, ***good!*** But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who ***is*** the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

Dan 3:16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

Dan 3:17 If that ***is the case***, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver ***us*** from your hand, O king.

Dan 3:18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

As scripture tells us, this upset Nebuchadnezzar so much he ordered the furnace to be turned ***up seven*** times hotter than it usually was heated. The fire was recorded as being so hot the "flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego." (verse 22)

I spent 12 years in the fire service, and have been in several very hot fires-infernos. I have been in what we called "the belly of the beast" watching flames climb up the wall, and roll across the ceiling, right over our heads. The heat is so intense, that even with our protective gear on, it banks down and forces us to the floor. There is no possible way we could stand in it, and withstand the heat- it would burn us- burn any exposed skin, and boil our sweat. So the best thing we could do is hit the deck, and turn the water stream on against the impeding flames as they rolled over our heads. And even that would cause more heat and steam to envelop us. But it had to happen in order to knock down the fire before it consumed us.

So with that information, let's look again at the scene the three Hebrew find themselves in. A fiery furnace burning seven times it's norm, because they refused to bow to anyone or anything other than the one and only God.

Dan 3:23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Dan 3:24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste *and* spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

Dan 3:25 "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Dan 3:26 Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace *and* spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come *here*." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire.

Dan 3:27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

Dan 3:28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel

and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!

Dan 3:29 Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this."

Dan 3:30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.

Because they refused to compromise, because they refused to sin, they didn't suffer. They were not burned, they were not hurt. As a matter of fact, they were promoted, and God was glorified!

So let's bring this home, and make it personal. We have all done the same thing at one time or another- choosing to sin. Maybe some of us are still doing it. Let's not fool ourselves- if we are choosing to sin, we are choosing to suffer. There are no two ways about that- it is as true today as it was back in the days of Adam and Eve. And we may even tell ourselves "no one else knows"- not even our spouse. The sin could be anything that God calls sin. It could be that easily besetting sin that we struggle with but eventually succumb to. But the bottom line is this -it doesn't matter what the sin is- there will always be a consequence to our actions (or inactions).

Folks, I suggest to you, the choice *is* ours- **Choose to sin- choose to suffer.**

Let's pray.