

Choices

Today I want to talk about choice
Every day we have to make a multitude of decisions
What to eat, how to drive, how to behave, what to do how to, coffee or tea.
We are all different and we all make different choices even when faced with the same options.
Let's do a small test
Here are three movies

{Slide: Three movies}

Infinity war - Midnight Sun - Sisters
Which one would you see?
Why? - Personal preferences, an inner desire within yourself.
Many of our life choices are made in similar fashion, an inner desire for something
A feeling that we get and we act upon it
Everyone different
Everyone unique
But it is a choice.

And sometimes it's not about the movie.
I can choose for example not to go to the movie I feel like going to and instead go to the one my wife wants to go to.
What happened there?
My priorities changed.

So even though stuff happens inside here, what I finally decide to do is a choice.

1) God chose Israel

Have you ever asked yourself the question - Why did God choose Israel?
Back in the OT days.
Out of all the nations that were around at the time.
Why Israel?
The Bible explains it in Deu 7v6-8

{Slide: Deu 7v6-8}

⁶*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has **chosen** you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*

⁷*The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of*

Egypt. ⁹Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

A people holy (set apart, dedicated) to the Lord.
Chosen to be His people, His treasured possession.

Who set them apart?

God did, He chose to set them apart.

One then has to ask that interesting yet awkward question that few ask.

Did God actually ask them if they wanted to be chosen?

No

Why not?

Because it wasn't their choice.

It's like being a child, you don't have a choice, you are just born into the family. At some point however we are faced with the choice, obey (the rules of the family) or don't (and face the consequences)
If you obey, things will go well for you, even though life will happen to you.
If you don't, things will be worse, as life happens to you.

And so Israel, like a child was not asked whether they wanted to be chosen or not.
God deemed them holy and set apart for His purposes.

It's kind of a weird question because who in their right mind would not want to be chosen?

Seriously

Chosen by God the Creator of the Universe to be His People or

Not.

I mean, who would say no (other than Moses)

And what was their role.

Be His representatives here on Earth

His ambassadors telling the world all about Him.

2) Most of Israel did not choose God

It turns out however that being chosen does not automatically convert into lifelong devotion

Even if you have been chosen by the Creator of the Universe.

And so Israel stood before a big choice

an enormous split in the road

And the choice felt something like this:

{Slide: Fork in the forest}



This is a significant moment in the life of the Israelites because they stood at the edge of greatness.

On the brink

They stood in front of the promised land

Promised to them by God Himself

The same God who had chosen them and then extracted them en masse from Egypt with a whole stack of miraculous signs to show them how set apart they really are.

Let's follow their thought processes:

Moses picks a leader from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to go and explore the land.

He gives them instructions on what to do, where to go, what to look for, what to bring back.

It took them 40 days.

They reported back - it is what you said

It does flow with milk and honey and here is the fruit.

So far so good.

However:

{Slide: Num 13v28}

²⁸*But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.*

There is some doubt.

The single path forward (obeying God) is starting to split.

It's become a Fork.

On the left is a growing opinion

On the right is a path that is starting to look particularly thorny.

Doubt is OK, we all doubt sometimes.

They felt scared, they were worried.

Some of them saw it differently

They still saw only one road.

{Slide: Num 13v30}

³⁰*Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."*

But the tide kept turning
Because instead of turning to God, the majority allowed their feelings full reign and turned to the rest of the people:

{Slide: Num 13v32}

³²*And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored.*

It shows again that if you want to follow a particular path you just share all the negatives with the crowd you want to influence.

And then it was game over for the chosen majority

Why?

Doesn't God still love them and weren't they still the chosen.

{Slide: Num 14v11}

¹¹*The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?"*

Faithlessness is the same as treating God with contempt.

The majority chose not to believe what God had promised and so they turned away from Him.

There was however a flicker of faith among the black clouds of faithlessness.

{Slide: Num 14v24}

²⁴*But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.*

A different spirit.

A wholehearted one

In NT language we would say he had a transformed mind.

Wholeheartedly, completely, in the NT we would say, "with all his heart".

Let's not forget Joshua who was the other half of the power duo that came back with a good report.

He led the new generation of Israelites into the promised land and towards the end he also stood before them, gave them a brief run down of their history up to that point, explaining how God had been the reason they had got to this point.

Then he left them with this choice:

{Slide: Jos 24v14-15}

¹⁴*"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then **choose** for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the*

Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

So there again, they stood at the **fork of faith** in the road
And they had to choose again
Either
the wide path of their own understanding
The narrow path of choosing to serve the Lord

{Slide: Fork in the forest}

So now we look at this decision point a little differently.

The left is the path that seems easier because it's the path of the Israelites own understanding, the one that did not require any faith in God, in fact it's the exact opposite, when they chose this path it showed they had way more faith in their own understanding than in where God was leading them.

The right is the path that seems more difficult because it's the path mapped out by God to test whether they had any faith in Him.

3) God chose us

So now we have seen how God chose the Israelites to represent Him here on earth.
Then we saw how the majority of the Israelites rejected God and chose a path of their own understanding.

So where does that leave us today.
The big question is, is it any different?

I'd like to make an observation
There is a big, built in drive within to want to stand out because there is something we have that makes us stand out from other people.
We want to be beautiful or handsome
Physically stronger or quicker than the rest
We play sport because we want to win
We want to be better than the other person, else why play?
We want to have money, not always because we need it but because we want to show others what we can buy with it.

Bigger car, bigger house, better area, better phone, nicer clothes etc
We're looking for some edge that will make us stand out from the crowd.
That's us, stuck in Egypt, needing a Saviour to rescue us.

Then God comes along and He says, "I don't care for any of that".

In fact, if we follow the argument that God used when He chose the Israelites, He said,
"The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples."

He chose them because they had a poorer chance of survival.

He chose the weaker on purpose.

And if you follow that thread through the Bible you will find it happened quite often.

"I don't care what you have, I do care that you need a Saviour"

Jesus is talking to His disciples.

{Slide: Joh 15v16}

¹⁶*You did not choose me, but **I chose you** and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit--fruit that will last--and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.*

He says you were chosen

Not for any particular attributes that you might have

But rather for what you are going to do for me, "bear fruit".

All the skills you might have learned out there in Egypt, is not why you have been chosen.

(Discuss conversation icw "They would make good disciples because ...")

And then we come to Peter's sermon at the beginning of Acts.

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What about the rest of us Gentiles you might ask?

That's a good question.

Because, at the beginning of the Christian movement, after Pentecost, it was mainly Jews who were being converted.

The same question that the council discussed in Acts 15 when the Jews said in Acts 15v5 that ,

"The gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses".

The Gentiles sweated a while as Peter, the Apostles and the Elders considered this question.

"After much discussion" the Bible says, Peter stood up and told the assembly that God had chosen, a while ago, to let the Gentiles hear the message from Peter's lips.

And He showed it again by giving them the Holy Spirit

So you guys can't add a whole lot of Man rules to God's equation.
But here is the bit I want to get to.

{Slide: Act 15v12-14}

¹²*The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.* ¹³*When they finished, James spoke up. "Brothers," he said, "listen to me.* ¹⁴*Simon has described to us how God first intervened to **choose** a people for his name from the Gentiles.*

Again that word, "chosen".

4) Choose God

I don't know what God sees in us but He chose us
And just like the Israelites who had to face their entry into the Promised Land
And decide whether to follow their will or obey God
So we face decisions every day
And that choice is no different
My will OR God's command
Really you may ask, every day?
Yes, every day and often several times a day.
I think we often stand at that barrier where we have to decide between
the promised land
and the road of my feelings or my opinion.
The one feels right, the other looks hard and difficult.

Let's look at some of the situations that we often face as a church as a whole or as an individual Christian within the church.
And forgive me if these examples seem simple, but I believe that if we understand the small things, it helps us get the bigger things right as well.

There is a disagreement between two people
Could be in a marriage, might be between two people in a FG.
A fork of faith appears in front of each of them.
On the left - follow the way of anger, hurt, opinion, self righteousness, victim mindset and all the other emotions that make up the vortex.
The right way - obedience to God's Word

{Slide: Col 3v12}

¹²*Therefore, as God's **chosen** people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* ¹³*Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* ¹⁴*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

God's chosen (ambassadors and representatives)

Holy (set apart) and dearly loved
Clothed (be completely covered) with
Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience
Bear with each other
Forgive one another - as God has forgiven you
All under the umbrella of love

And if we choose to walk a distance down the road on the Left.
Then at some point another fork appears
This time the right way is to choose, confession, humility, Godly sorrow

Change is happening in the church
Some of the FG's in the church are being rearranged, shutdown, strengthened.
There is change.
Most people hate change.
Because change makes us uncomfortable.
I hate change because I live my life according to a rhythm.
(Get up at a certain time etc)
Then we were asked to help out in Capetown.
And my whole world was uprooted.
But what happened in the first century was much worse.
Jesus had said in

{Slide: Act 1v8}

... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

You will be the ones to go out to the ends of the earth.
But they didn't go.
It took the stoning of Stephen and a great persecution of the church in Jerusalem in Acts 8 which then led to all the Christians being scattered with the result that:

{Slide: Act 8v4}

⁴Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

God works through change.
We can step into the promised land, knowing that it will be rough or
We can turn back and stay with the safe choice of what we think and feel.

I heard this about a sister when the change was proposed.
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OR You're facing your tax return and you can go the path of least resistance and fudge the figures or choose the narrow road that will mean less money but a blessed future

OR You're facing that big decision, what should my monthly contribution be. You can go the path of least resistance, called the wide road, where you see what little you can get away

with or you can step into the promised land, where the Bible uses language like tithing and generous, even though the gate is narrow, because you know the road leads to life.

OR You're faced with getting to church at 09h00 on Sundays or to midweek or to a Bible study or to a Bible talk or to a Family Group get together and you can go the path of least resistance and make excuses and fill that time with other things and shift that occasional time down to the bottom of your list of priorities or
You can cross that line, like Caleb and Joshua and shout like them, "Give me the hill country" or "As for me and my house we will follow the Lord" in spite of rocky road of inconveniences and difficulties that will be encountered because you know on the other side is a glorious future because you have a Living Hope

You see when we become a Christian and we make Jesus Lord, we state emphatically that the time of compromise and following the rest of the sheep destined for destruction is over. We say No.
No more compromise.
We choose the Promised Land.

(Vince and Linda and all the members of their Family Group (Cyril and Carol), out in Steenburg, faithfully running their their Bt miles from church but still that whole group travels long distances Sunday after Sunday, often times having to be where early. He chose Cyril and Carol who have been servants for ever, getting up at some unearthly hour every Sunday to be here at 07h30, ready to serve. Raymond and Candice who run the KZ. Ricardo and the new Bt.)

We choose the Promised Land, because that's the land God Himself has given me.