

*“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”*”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It is the climactic scene in the movie, “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom”. After joining a search that has lasted centuries; after the action and adventure that only Hollywood can produce, our hero finds himself confronted by a knight of the Crusades, who has miraculously survived hundreds of years as guardian of the Holy Grail. The grail is most commonly identified as the cup that Jesus drank from at the Last Supper and that Joseph of Arimathea later used to collect Jesus’s blood when He was crucified. It was said to have special healing powers and could provide happiness, eternal youth or sustenance in infinite abundance. It is part of the mystic ideas that are associated with relics of saints, and which are mere fanciful thoughts, not divine truth.

Anyway, in the movie, Indiana Jones sees before him a variety of cups and chalices of different designs and beauty. Which is the Grail? The knight warns, “You must choose. But choose wisely, for while the true Grail will bring you life, the false Grail will take it from you.” The villain chooses the most gaudy, bejewelled and richest looking of the chalices, drinks from it, and finds that it brings forth death. The knight simply says, “He chose...poorly”. When Indiana Jones chooses, he looks at a simple wooden cup: “that’s the cup of a carpenter”. “You have chosen wisely”, the knight assures him.

In our text today, Moses holds a similar choice before the people of Israel: *“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. . . .Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days.”* The choice should be obvious. We get confused by the glitter and glamour of the world, and fail to see the life that God sets before us in His grace, but the smart choice is found in the life that God gives us through His grace in Jesus Christ—a life that is a blessing for all eternity.

As Moses speaks in our text today, things are about to change for the people of Israel. After their exodus from Egypt and the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, they now stand on the brink of the land *“that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”* The coming days will bring some major challenges to the people. Moses, the prophet *whom the LORD knew face to face,*” (Deuteronomy 34:10, ESV) will not be going with them into the promised land. Joshua has already been named as successor. God will give the land into their hands, but that doesn’t mean there won’t be some struggles in claiming that land. When they enter the land of Canaan, the people are going to be confronted by the false gods of the people around them. Things that may seem tempting and pleasant; attitudes and lifestyles that may seem more desirable or simpler than that which God commands will confront the people. But Moses makes it clear. Life is found in God, and in Him alone. The false gods of the world only bring forth death. Moses urges them, *Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.*

Before we go too far, maybe we should deal with that whole idea of choice. Moses is not suggesting that the people have to choose God if they want to be saved. Moses is speaking to the people whom God has already chosen as His own. God has made His covenant with them. While they were still slaves in Egypt, God tells them: *“I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”* (Exodus 6:7, ESV) This is exactly what He says as He establishes His covenant with them at Mount Sinai” *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. “You shall have no other gods before*

*me.*” (Exodus 20:2–3, ESV) Moses will remind the people: **“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”** (Deuteronomy 7:6, ESV) God has made Himself known to His people. He has redeemed them, saved them and delivered them. He has given them life. Moses isn’t so much saying, “choose to have that life”, as he is saying, “be careful that you aren’t lured into death, without realizing it”.

In the same way, God has chosen us as His treasured possession. Jesus assures us: **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide”.** (John 15:16, ESV) We are God’s children because He chose us. He marked us as His own in Holy Baptism. He bought us back for Himself as the Eternal Son of God dies in our place on the cross. Paul will even remind us, **“do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”** (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, ESV)

It is because we are already the people of God, saved by His loving grace, that we are called to choose the life we now have as that gift of God. Like those many chalices in the Indiana Jones movie, we are confronted with countless choices day after day that can keep us from the life that we have as redeemed people. The devil and the world hold out jewelled chalices, riches and pleasures that can be so tempting. They can all seem so much better, especially when the life we have as God’s people can bring forth the struggles, the persecution and the hatred that seem to make it so hard to be faithful. It’s so much easier to give in; so much easier to go along. The world even tells us that we will enjoy it! All we have to do is lay aside God’s commands for the sake of the worldly things that seem so pleasant. But the wrong choice, as Moses reminds the people of Israel, is the way of death. We can have it all in this world, and still come up empty when all is said and done. Choosing poorly takes life from us, even if it seems to give the best life in the here and now.

There were times when I wanted to join the crowd, join my friends in doing things of which my parents disapproved. “But everyone’s going! Everyone’s doing it!” My dad’s answer was always the same: “I don’t care what everyone else does. You are my son, and you will do what I think is best”. In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus holds His people to a higher standard than they often see around them: **“You have heard that it was said ... But I say to you.”** (Matthew 5:21–22, ESV) “You are my child”, God declares. “You can’t be like the rest of the world. I call you to something better. I call you to life, and not just any life but life in its fulness. I call you to an eternity of joy and blessing. As you walk in my commands, you will show the world the wonder and glory of who I am, and the power of My love. You will be an example for them. You will help them see the smart choice that not only makes life better now, but which can make it better for all eternity.”

Jesus speaks of His people being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. But can we shed any light if we ourselves choose to live in the dark? Peter reminds us: **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”** (1 Peter 2:9–10, ESV) As we walk in the light of God’s truth, we not only declare that God is doing great things for us; we are helping others to see the greatness of our God.

More and more we see a world in which God’s truth is set aside for the ideologies and philosophies of man’s sinful heart. So many are lured away by things that have no real or lasting value. People turn from God, because they think there is more benefit and pleasure in what the world has to offer. They choose...poorly. They want us to make the same choices that they make. In fact, they revile and hate us for being different in any way. Yet we know there is only one choice. As Moses said: ***If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you.*** God has already blessed us with life in Christ. We have that Saviour who died, and who rose from death, to lead us into a life that never ends. Blessed in His grace and equipped through His Word and Sacraments, we can go forth into a world of temptation, testings, and moral imbalance—so many evil choices—fully capable of making the one right choice between two paths. We don’t really have—we don’t want—any other choices. We choose to obey God’s voice, follow him, and turn aside from the many voices of the devil, the world, and our flesh. That is the only smart choice. It is the only choice we can make as new creations in Christ. God, in His Word and by the power of His Holy Spirit calls you as His own. He makes you alive in Christ. Now choose life, as you live as the people He has made you by His grace. Amen.