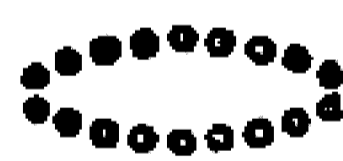




Choosing the Best.

BY J. H. T.



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CHOOSING THE BEST.

(DAN. I. 8, 14-17, 20, 21 ; I TIM. IV. 7, 8, 15, 16 ;
ACTS XX. 9-12.)

IN these scriptures we have brought before us the example of certain young men in regard to their choice as to whom they would serve. Having in mind especially the young, one would seek the prayerful interest of those who are older in this question of choice.

We are all aware that the present day is one in which young people are greatly in evidence in this world. In the business world young men are filling the positions of greatest importance ; in the political world again they are prominent ; indeed there is no phase of life in this world in which young men are not shining, according to this world's estimate. There is a saying current that men are "too old at forty," and behind that remark is this inference, that men are on the look out for *young* men to play their part in adorning this present evil world, whether politically, socially, or religiously.

God, too, is working with young men, and the Lord is seeking after what is young and fresh for His world, for He would have the very best, as is fitting. We know what His feelings are in regard of young men, for in Mark's gospel (chap. x. 21), referring to a certain young man, it is said that the Lord "beholding him, loved him." It was not a passing glance, but "*beholding him,*" He loved him. I have no doubt in my own mind that the Lord saw traces of the divine handiwork in that young man. Probably he was held in high esteem amongst men ; but I believe the Lord loved him in view of the divine possibilities in him.

Yet He had to say to him, "One thing thou lackest," not many things, but *one* thing, and the thing that he lacked was committal. He was indefinite ; he was weighing things in the balance, his property, his possessions, for they were great ! He was thinking perhaps of a path that was broad. Men would not blame him for that, and the Lord does not accuse him ; but this young man was weighing those things over against the possibility of following Jesus in the path of reproach and shame, and

alas, his eye was on the wrong side of the balance! Had his eye been solely on Jesus, he would have seen peerless beauty and worth beyond compare! Had he fixed his eye steadfastly on that blessed Person, he would have been bound to acknowledge finally that every other man, even the most illustrious that this world has seen or will see, must fade into oblivion as compared with Jesus.

The Lord is not hard with you, young man, He is only pointing out that which is best for you. "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor." He did not tell the young man to *give away all* that he possessed, but he told him to *sell* all. Had he been prepared for that great surrender, he would have had wisdom from above as to the disposal, as a wise steward, of the wealth that was in his hand. Well, he looked at his possessions—and he looked at the Lord, and he chose his possessions. It is one of the saddest pictures in scripture! So I desire to bring before you the thought of *choice*; it runs right through scripture.

You will remember that one of the earliest incidents in scripture referring to choice is in

connection with Jacob. It is stated of Jacob that he said Jehovah should be his God on certain conditions. His conditions were not beyond God to fulfil. "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on . . . then shall the Lord be my God." (Gen. xxviii. 20, 21.) Jacob desired protection, food and clothing—things easy for God to provide ; but God goes far beyond those terms, for He says, "I will not leave thee until I have done that which *I* have spoken to thee of." Again Moses made a choice ; it is said of him that "he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." They were treasures that might well have been coveted, treasures of rarity and worth ; but he made his choice as over the balances. He weighed on one side his prospects in this world, no mean prospects indeed ! He was brought up to be a son to Pharaoh's daughter ; he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in word and deed. But on the other side of the balances he put the reproach of Christ. He might not have been particularly intelligent about the ex-

pression, "the reproach of Christ," but scripture refers to it in that connection, and he esteemed it as being "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt."

Then further it says, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king." You may say, But he went out of Egypt as a fugitive. Well, according to Hebrews, which is the record of the movements of faith, it is said, "he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king." You see how God will accredit the smallest evidence of faith, so long as you move. It is of little value speaking of your faith unless you move, for faith is intended to bring about movement.

There were others in scripture who made a definite choice. In the case of David, what a choice he made! He says, referring to the ark, "We heard of it at Ephratah." (Psa. cxxxii. 6.) Probably his father Jesse had told him about the ark. But does he content himself with hearing about it? No, he says, "We found it," and found it "in the fields of the wood," indicating how he was prepared, typically, to accept the rejection of Christ, and enter into the feelings of Christ in regard to

it. The psalm tells us that "he vowed." I covet earnestly that many a young man or woman might vow as David vowed! He vowed that he would neither give sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids till he found a place for Jehovah, a resting-place for the ark!

It is good to trace through the scriptures the definite committals of the saints, both men and women; many of them made a definite choice in their youth. If it is not made in youth, years are lost that will never be recalled, and that can never be made up. I would plead with you to make this definite choice in connection with the "reproach of Christ" whilst your heart is tender, whilst your mind is receptive, whilst there is still elasticity of mind. Those who are older have told me that when one gets to a certain age the mind loses its elasticity, and is not so receptive as formerly; it may lose its power of retention—that is why I plead with the young at this time.

In regard of these three young men, Daniel, Timothy and Eutychus, I would beg you to accept the challenge which I believe the Lord would raise at this time: in connection with

Daniel, as touching the question of separation ; with Timothy as to piety ; with Eutychus as to ministry. Those are the three simple thoughts on which they were called to make choice—separation, piety and ministry.

I refer first to Daniel. Probably Daniel had more to boast of than most of us. He may have been of the royal seed ; in any case, we know that he belonged to the nobles of Judah, and came of noble stock. His lineage was therefore beyond anything of which most of us could boast. We know that he was well favoured, that he was of good appearance, that he had manners which would enable him to stand in the presence of a king, even such as Nebuchadnezzar ! He was the greatest monarch that had ever reigned, for to no other monarch had ever been delegated absolute power from God. We read of “Nebuchadnezzar *the* king,” and Daniel was a fit and proper person to stand in the presence of such a king. A time came when he was definitely challenged as to the king and Babylon. He might have said, Well, this is the ordering of God ; I had no part in selecting these circumstances, I must just make the best of them.

Many would have said that. But the scripture says that “he *purposed* in his heart that he would not defile himself” ; not that he would not gratify himself, but that he would not *defile* himself—mark that word ! Do you not think some of us might have gratified ourselves with the king’s delicate food ? We might have thought, This has come from the king’s table ; it is the king’s delicate food, and the wine which he drinks ; the wine, so to speak, of a connoisseur, one who understood wines and would have the very best.

I want you to notice the wisdom seen with Daniel : he first purposed in his heart that he would not defile, or pollute, himself with the king’s delicate food, neither with the wine which he drank, and when he had so purposed, he requested. That is a delightful thing ! He had come to a definite choice, and then he requested of the eunuch that he might not defile himself. There is profit for us in this detail ! He did not go to the eunuch and say, I would rather not eat of this food ; he did not say, I am not free about it ; but he told the eunuch virtually that if he ate this delicate food it would pollute him. There were no

half measures there ! It was not that he purposed the thing in his heart and kept quiet about it. It has been wisely said that the government of God serves the testimony, and this is seen in the case of Daniel. Melzar says, "I fear my lord the king." He intimates that if they did not eat of this delicate food and drink of the wine he had provided, their countenances would suffer. Now, young man, who is the happier, one who has one foot in the world and one with the people of God ; or one who is *wholly* identified with the people of God ? One who takes up the sorrows connected with the reproach of Christ has the joy spoken of in Proverbs xiv. 10. His heart indeed may know its own bitterness, but no stranger intermeddles with his joy, and what a joy ! I commend this definiteness to you.

Then Daniel asked that they might be proved ten days ; there is wisdom in that, for ten days suggests the whole period of one's responsible course here. And at the end of ten days the countenances of these four youths (for that is what they were—not middle-aged men, but four *youths*) appeared fairer, and were fatter in flesh than all those who ate of the

king's meat and drank of his wine. There is the proof! You say, How did it come about? God did it. But you say, if I give up what Babylon offers, see what I lose. Well, I say, if you give up what Babylon offers, see what you *gain*! For if Babylon turns you aside, God will give you wisdom.

In speaking about education we recognise that children *must* be educated; they will have to fill a certain niche or sphere in relation to a responsible path, and they must be educated for it; but if I see a principle at stake as to any subject of education, I would take that to God, and if it involves surrender on the part of parent or child, God will make it up; He will more than make up for any surrender that has been made.

“As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom.” Why, they matriculated more brilliantly than any one in Babylon! They had understanding “in all matters of judicious wisdom,” and when the king inquired of them he found them “ten times better than all the scribes and magicians that were in all his realm.” Well, is not that compensation for

surrender? I have seen it scores of times in the histories of the saints of God, that where surrender is made definitely for the interests of Christ, and Babylon refused, God comes in. It is a question I would put to you, Into which world do you want to put your best? You may put it into Babylon; you may put it into Egypt; but God says of Babylon it shall sink and shall not rise. (Jer. li. 64.)

Nebuchadnezzar said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" Yet what do you find? When Nebuchadnezzar has gone, Daniel is still there; when Belshazzar has gone, Daniel is still there; when Darius the Mede has gone, still Daniel is there; and when this world religiously or politically or socially has run out its time, the word to Daniel is, "thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." That is what a young man gets who surrenders! Babylon may offer much, it may tempt and allure; it may offer a position in the world at the expense of the testimony; it may promote you for its *own* glory, but not for yours. It cares nothing for yours. The moment you become sick, like the young man who was

servant to an Amalekite, it will cast you aside like a worthless rag. (1 Sam. xxx. 13.)

Men speak of the pleasures of the world ; scripture calls them “the pleasures of sin *for a season.*” Of Egypt with its glory, with its sport, with its learning, the Spirit of God says, “I will make the land of Egypt deserts of wasteness.” (Ezek. xxix. 10.) God said through Moses, “The river shall stink,” and it was so ; and later we read the “land stank,” and frogs came up into the beds and into the kneading troughs, and into the ovens. (Exo. viii.) Behind all the glamour of this world there is a filth that scripture describes as a stench. There is nothing in it pleasurable to God. Then why should I remain in such a world ? Why should I patronise it ? why yield my brains, my talents—the things with which God has endowed me, in His perfect wisdom—why should I yield those things to the fleeting glory of this world ?

Now to refer to Timothy, the Apostle Paul had great regard for Timothy. He described him as his own son, and as a father for a son so he would be careful to covet the very best for Timothy. There is only one “best” in

scripture ! Paul says to Timothy, “Profane and old wives’ fables avoid, but exercise thyself unto *piety*.” Now we have come to a most important point. People say, and not without a measure of truth, My child must have exercise. I agree with that. They say, The young must have something in the way of recreation. That too is quite true ; I have no difficulty about that ; but what I desire to put before you is this question of the *best*. Here is a young man—and if any young man in scripture, or in this room, had licence to go in for bodily exercise, that young man was Timothy ! We know that he had frequent illnesses, and perhaps that is not the lot of many who make a plea for recreation and bodily exercise. Paul says to him, “Drink no longer only water, but use a little wine on account of thy stomach and thy frequent illnesses.”

You may not have thought about that. You say, I must have recreation ; I must have sport ; I must fill up my spare time in relation to my bodily needs. Now, is it only bodily needs ? is it only recreation ? or is it that there is in your heart, as there used

to be in mine, an idol, an innate love of sport? I find often, when people speak about the need of recreation, that they ingrain into the hearts of the young a love for something that is rarely eradicated to the full. Here is a young man who could have made every excuse—frequent illnesses—he may have spent hours in considering for his body, and perhaps this is in Paul's mind when he says, "bodily exercise is profitable for a little"—he is not legal. Why should he refer to bodily exercise? What has that to do with piety? Well, it is a matter of choice. I speak frankly. I feel we have not long to stay here, the Lord is coming soon, and I feel it my bounden duty to speak solemnly about this point. Why should he refer to bodily exercise alongside of piety? Is it that he is against bodily exercise? It does not say so. Is he an extremist who would do away altogether with bodily exercise? Never! He speaks the truth about it; he says, "bodily exercise is profitable for a little." We are quite sober in what we are speaking of; it profits for a little—but, listen, "piety is profitable for everything."

Now, dear young friend, which do you want?

Do you want the kind of profit that is just for a little? or do you want the kind of profit that is "for everything, having promise of life, of the present one, and of that to come"? How delightful is this prospect! It is not that I am against bodily exercise. Do not misunderstand me; I have enjoyed it as much as any one perhaps, but the time past must suffice for that. Now I see a blessed vista before me in exercising myself to piety, that it is profitable for all things, both for this life and for that which is to come. You may spend pleasant hours at tennis, or some other pastime, but it is a question once more of the balances. At one time one lived for that kind of thing, and if one could not participate in it, one read about it, till the mind became saturated with it. Now, put in the balances, which is it to be—this bodily exercise or piety?

You say, What is piety? Well, piety is that you bring God in. It is not that you bring the brethren in, but you bring God in. You could say many things to the brethren in defence of your position that you dare not say to God. Piety is that I go to God, I tell

God all about my desires and doings and exercises. Would you tell God what pleasant and profitable hours you are spending in this bodily exercise? Could you tell God that? You might say it to the brethren, but piety means not that I have to do with the brethren, but with God. What shall I tell God? Now let us be frank. Here is this fleeting thing which scripture says is profitable for a little, over against it is this blessed thing, piety, which the word says "is profitable for everything, having promise of life, of the present one, and of that to come."

Now you say that you love the Lord, and I am sure you have no wish at all to go to heaven like a ship coming into harbour without sails and with broken masts. You would prefer, as Peter says, to have an abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." You do not want to be "saved yet so as by fire." You want a full and abundant entrance into the kingdom; but if you have put very little into it now, you will have very little to come into then. If you are not laying up treasure where moth and rust do not corrupt, nor

thieves break through and steal, what will you have when you come to face the Lord Jesus Christ? I assure you I speak with affection and longing, that your body and your time might be devoted to Christ and His holy interests, and the choice lies with you between piety and bodily exercise. You may think you can go on with both. Scripture does not say so; it says there is a thing that is profitable for a little, and there is a thing that is profitable for all, "having promise of life, of the present one, and of that to come." Then the apostle, reminding Timothy of the reproach that comes in this pathway says, "We labour and suffer reproach," and finally he says, "Meditate upon these things." It is a question now of my mind; it is not merely my physical well-being, but how I use my mind. "Meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them"—the latter is purpose of heart.

Some young believers say, I read the scriptures, but I get so little from them. Well, pray about it, and read on. Be diligent! I look back upon a past of much lost time. Some of us were very diligent in reading other

books—novels, and the like. Shall we lack in diligence now when *the best* is put before us? If you do not get light on scripture, what is wrong? Your taste is wrong. We never had difficulty about reading the world's books, so fascinating were they; we were diligent enough then! Shall we be less diligent in relation to the holy writings? "Occupy thyself with these things: be wholly in them." That is a fine word for young people. Then Paul says further, "Give heed to thyself and to the teaching; continue in them; for, doing this, thou shalt save both thyself and those that hear thee."

A young man some time ago gave as his reason for not remembering the Lord, that he loved sport. He admitted that he loved the Lord, but he felt it would not be honest to break bread. Are we giving the Lord the second place in our affections? Our conduct is bound to react upon others; we cannot avoid it: "Give heed to thyself . . . for, doing this, thou shalt save both thyself and those that hear thee." Let us each be a model. Paul says, "Be a model of the believers," not exactly, *to* the believers, but a model *of* them.

I would not speak without exercise about these things, but I feel it to be necessary, and I plead with any one who is dishonouring Christ, who is compromising the fellowship, who is sitting down to eat and drink and rising up to play. (1 Cor. x. 7.) *That* is idolatry, according to scripture.

To refer now to Eutychus, the word says of him that he was sitting at the window-opening. You say, What does that mean? In simple language it means that my interests are divided, I am half-hearted. You cannot expect to enjoy ministry and what the Lord is saying to the assembly if you have an eye on the world. Eutychus is a solemn warning as sitting in a window-opening. The most precious ministry was being told out. The Apostle Paul, a living exponent of the ministry, is speaking, and there is this young man asleep! Some of us would have gone hundreds of miles, if we had the liberty and means of travel, to hear Paul speak, yet here is a young man sitting in a window-opening, overpowered with deep sleep.

You might say, It is incredible. But no; it is happening to-day. Paul is not here truly,

but there is the living voice of Christ here to-day, and a most precious ministry is being given, and yet there are young men who are falling asleep ! You cannot blame the ministry. You may complain that it is above you and does not come down to where you are ; but what is the value of ministry that comes down to where you are ? Ministry is, so to speak, the next brick ; it is to build you up ! Do not blame the ministry if you do not understand it, do not blame the minister. If the minister has got it, why not you ?

Eutychus was overpowered with deep sleep and fell down from the third storey and was taken up dead. Well, here is a challenge. Would you rather read a book than go to the meeting ? Would you rather go out and get some bodily exercise than be found amongst the people of God ? Well, if that is so, it is your taste that is wrong. It is not the saints, and it is not the food that is wrong, for it is of the very best. But if those are your desires as you come in amongst the people of God, is it to be wondered at if you are overpowered by deep sleep ? I love to see in this present day the scores of young men and women whose

ears are opened, who are exercised not only to hear the ministry, but to be obedient to it ; to be hearers and “doers of the word.” Do you say you do not see much in the ministry? Pray God that you may, for there is much in it, but before you can appreciate the ministry of Paul, you must learn to appreciate the ministry of John, for he brings before us the nature of God, and “God is love.”

Well, “Paul descended.” (Ver. 10.) Being an apostle, he might have commanded others to bring up the young man to where *he* was, but he descended. And then he fell upon him and enfolded him in his arms. It is love, that greatest thing, seen in this minister who personified the ministry. The great apostle fell upon him and embraced him, and said, “Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him.” Then what does the scripture say? It is a beautiful word—I commend it to you. What joy it would give us to see you whole-heartedly devoted to the interests of Christ! It says, “They brought away the boy alive, and were no little comforted.” You may say, I thought they did not care much about the way I was going on. You may never have known how

many tears have been shed over *you*—how many times they have prayed for *you*. “They brought away the boy alive,” he is a living asset now, and it says that they were not a little comforted. What a source of rejoicing and comfort it would be if you shewed signs of life and definiteness.

Let us then remember that Daniel is the challenge to separation, Timothy to piety, and Eutychus as to the ministry, and the value we put upon it. May the Lord help us to appreciate His things, and to be “wholly in them.”

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