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CHOICE -- A SERMON
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INTRODUCTION

In the Book of Joshua, the 24th chapter and the 15th verse, you will find these words: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." These words, as you know, were spoken by Joshua. Mr. Webster says, "Choice is the voluntary power of selecting." This is a simple definition. Not involuntary power but voluntary. "Choose ye." Choice is a marvelous thing. If we could open Heaven tonight, and see the host of glorious beings, and ask them why they were there, they would respond, "We are here because we made a right choice." It seems to me that if we could open the doors of the damned, and behold the poor miserable occupants of that world, and ask them why they are there, a chorus of voices, like distant thunder would answer, "We are here because we made a wrong choice." A right choice means Heaven, and a wrong choice means Hell.

There have been many tragedies in this lost world, but the parent tragedy was the worst; that took place in the garden of Eden, the beautiful, holy home prepared by the Lord for His holy children. God gave them two laws -- a positive and a negative law. The positive law was that they dress the garden and keep it. The negative law was, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." But the devil, that subtle, cunning being that hates God and hates you, came and said, "Ye shall not die." And they believed the devil rather than God. The devil also said, "Ye shall be as gods;" but such gods as they were. They became cowardly, cringing criminals. Sin will make fools out of us. Sin made Adam and Eve believe that they could hide themselves from an omniscient God among the trees of the garden. Truly a tragic loss -- they lost so much. They lost fellowship with God, they lost their relationship with God. The biggest lie out of hell is that sin will sever fellowship but not relationship. No, sin severs fellowship and, moreover, sin severs relationship. When Lucifer fell he lost his fellowship and also his relationship. When Adam and Eve fell they lost their fellowship and also their relationship. It was a tragic loss. They lost their fellowship, lost their relationship, lost their peace, lost their rest, lost their home, lost God. But one thing

survived the fall, and that was choice. Aren't you glad? Adam and Eve suffered tragic loss, but they could still choose. Thank God, we can choose.

But when does temptation become sin, if it does become sin? Of course, there is no sin in temptation. If there were, Jesus was the greatest sinner who ever lived, for the devil tempted Him to the most diabolical sin, and that was to worship the devil. I would rather steal, lie, or get drunk than worship the devil. So, while there is no sin in temptation, temptation may be the avenue to sin. But now the question is, when does temptation become sin, in case it does? It is when one yields to temptation. Eve saw the tree, desired the fruit and finally partook. She saw the tree was good to the taste it was good to look at, and would make one wise; but the question is, when did she sin? When she saw, when she desired, or when she took? You say it was when she partook. No, it was just before she partook, it was when she made the fatal decision.

Take Achan, for example. He saw that good Babylonish garment, he desired it, and then he took it. But when did Achan sin? Not when he saw or desired, necessarily, but when he made the fatal choice. He made the choice and then took. A boy goes down the road, who hasn't had an apple for a month. There is quite an affinity between a boy's stomach and red apples; and the boy sees those apples and desires them, but he has not necessarily sinned yet. But when does he sin, in case he does? You say, "It is when he gets over the fence." No, it is just before he gets over the fence; it is when he makes the fatal choice. If he remembers that God says, "Thou shalt not steal," and thus resists the devil and makes a right choice he comes out a victor.

These are strenuous days, but I would seek to help you at the risk of being misunderstood. We think the most damning sin of the age is the nude craze. Jesus said, "Whosoever looketh (looks and keeps looking) on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." -- Matt. 5:28. As already suggested, the sin is not necessarily in the seeing or in the desire, but in making the fatal decision. The essence of almost all temptation is to satisfy a right desire in a wrong way. Every onslaught of the devil in the temptation of Jesus was to induce Him to satisfy a right desire in a wrong way. Think of these! A young man, saved and sanctified, may come in contact with one of these nude vixens, vamps, and the enemy may tempt him; but if he resists the devil and the vamp, he comes out victorious.

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01 -- LOT'S CHOICE

This brings us directly to our subject -- CHOICE. We would notice for our lesson three Bible characters -- one who made a wrong choice and two who made a right choice. We will take the one who made the wrong choice first Lot by name. In the Book of Genesis we read of the choice that Lot made. As you know, he was Abraham's nephew, and they were both rich in cattle, silver, and gold. There was a strife between the herdmen of Abraham and the herdmen of Lot; and Abraham said, "Let there be no strife between us, for we are brethren." Then Abraham said, "If you go to the left, I will go to the right; or if you go to the right, I will go to the left." Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the well-watered plains of Jordan -- he saw them, and desired them. Steps to Sodom: he saw the plains, he desired them, he pitched his tent toward Sodom, and then took up his abode in Sodom. I don't think Lot meant to become so Sodomized as he did; but you

can never tell how far one will go when he starts on the toboggan slide to hell. Lot made his fatal choice, but why did he make it? Because of spiritual advantage? No, his motives were worldly and selfish.

Just a word relative to Abraham's statement about their being brethren. Abraham said, in substance, "The Canaanite is in the land, and if we believe in the true God and have strife between us, the unbelievers will not have much faith in our religion." So it is today; if those of us who profess holiness have strife among ourselves, it will be hard to convince outsiders of the genuineness of old-fashioned, second-blessing holiness. But we are to notice two things concerning Lot: first, what he gained; and second, what he lost.

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What He Gained

Doubtless, he gained a great deal. He obtained the well-watered plains of Jordan; doubtless, large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. And no doubt he gained much in Sodom. Maybe he was the mayor of the city, for when the angels came he sat in the gates of the city. That was a place where the principal man sat. No doubt he had a fine home and great prestige in Sodom. Probably his wife and daughters were prominent in all the social activities of the city. There are temporary pleasures in sin. Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." So doubtless Lot gained quite a bit by this choice.

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What He Lost

First of all, he lost fellowship with Abraham. It must have been a great privilege to gather around the smoking altar with Abraham, but he forgot all of this. Thank God for the fellowship of God's people. I am going to stay with them if they will let me; if not, I am going to stay anyhow! They have me on their hands.

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love...

"We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear."

But Lot lost all of this.

Second, he lost all he had gained of a material nature in Sodom. If he had a fine home, that was consumed in the conflagration upon Sodom. He lost all of his material possessions.

Third, he lost the respect of his family. I have heard people say, "I do not care what people think about me." Well, I do. I think what they mean is that they would rather please God than please anyone on earth. If that is what they mean, then I can say "Amen" to it. You say, "If you stand for the good old-fashioned way of Bible holiness they will put you out." Well, if they do, you will still be in. John was banished to the Isle of Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. He was out, but was still in. I would rather be on Patmos, excommunicated, hearing what John heard and seeing what John saw, than to be pastor of the First Church, a time-serving, compromising hireling. But Lot lost the respect of his family.

You remember that two angels came to Sodom that evening. We might pause just a moment here and notice the angels are male. There are no lady angels. But I see a rather inquisitorial look on a lady's face. Now, ladies, don't be discouraged; we are not angels and will never be, as angels are a different order of beings from human beings. Angels were created before the human race. So you make it to Heaven just the same, if you are true. Did you ever notice that all the pictures of angels you ever saw are either women or babies? But all this is wrong. The angels are all male. My wife says no one could ever imagine a man being an angel! But these two angels came to Sodom to look the situation over -- to see if conditions in Sodom corresponded with the cry that came up to Heaven. Lot retained some of that spirit of hospitality which he had gotten, no doubt, from his Uncle Abraham. So he insisted that the angels come in and spend the night with him. They at first refused, but finally consented.

Soon the wicked Sodomites gathered at his home and said, "Bring these men out, that we may know them." We once thought this meant to get acquainted with them, but after more careful study it seems there was another meaning altogether. Many of the old theologians declare that they desired what is now called homo-sexuality. If you desire to know just what that means read the first chapter of the Book of Romans. Wicked abomination, worse than adultery if possible, wrong relationship between members of the same sex. Bring them out that we may know them. Sodomy, horrible, shuddering! Much of that is now breaking out in schools and colleges. Then Lot made that unmentionable proposition to them, "Permit me to bring my two daughters, who have never known man." This seems to substantiate just what we mentioned above.

Then the angels, or men, who were inside reached out and pulled Lot in and shut the door. Then the angel said, "Have you any here in this city beside your wife and these two daughters? If so, bring them out of this place, for we will destroy the city." Then we see Lot as he slips out his back door, for the mob was at the front door, and he goes to the home of one of his married daughters. He insists that they come with him at once and leave the city, for the judgments of God would soon be falling upon it; but all in vain. Then he goes to the home of another daughter with the same ill effect. "He seemed as one that mocked to his sons-in-law." Doubtless they felt he had lost his mind. Then we see Lot wending his way back through some dark alley, perhaps, to his home, and we hear him as he wails, "I got them in, but I can't get them out." He had lost the respect of his family.

Yes, the minister or the church may lead their families or members into the world but they cannot get them out. That is the situation too often today. The minister and church may lead their members into all kinds of social functions, fairs, feasts, and entertainments, and then desire

to change; but all in vain. They get them in, but can't get them out. Parents may take their children to the down-town show or get the TV show in the home, and find the family becoming slaves to all of this. They may then seek to make a change, but all in vain. They have lost respect.

Fourth, Lot lost his family. Finally, after his unsuccessful attempt to alarm his married daughters, Lot returned to his home, whereupon the angels hastened him, declaring they would burn Sodom. But Lot and his family were loath to leave. Why? Because their treasures were there, and "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." So the angels literally pulled them out. They laid hold of the hand of Lot and of his wife and daughters, and brought them out. Then they gave instructions. Lot and his family were to flee to the mountain, and they were not to stop or look back. But Lot insisted that they could not make it to the mountain. Shame on him! We can do, by the help of God, anything "that He commands.

It is said John and Charles Wesley were talking one day, and John said to Charles, "What would you do if God commanded you to fly?" Charles answered, "If God commanded me to fly, I would trust God to give me some wings and then I would fly." Charles was the singer, but John was the theologian. John was not very big, but covered all the ground he stood on. He had backbone something greatly needed today. So John raised himself up to his full height and said, "Look here, Charles, if God commanded me to fly, I would fly, wings or no wings." So it is, for whatever God commands He furnishes grace. God tells us to be clean, be holy, be ready for death or for the Lord's coming.

But we read that Lot's wife looked back. She did not go back, but simply looked back, and the judgment of God fell upon her, and she was turned into a pillar of salt. A wrong look may damn us. No wonder Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife." Finally, Lot and his two daughters came to a cave and entered. God said mountains, but they stopped in a cave. Sad, sordid things took place in this cave. We may expect calamity when we refuse to go on with God. Lot was drunk, and his two daughters were in the way of motherhood by their father. Incest. Would God they were dead.

Yes, Lot lost a great deal. He lost fellowship with Abraham, and lost all he had gained in a material way -- burned in Sodom. He lost the respect of his family, lost his family, and lost God. In the New Testament, we read of "that righteous man" Lot; but anyone who can disobey God and be drunk in a cave must have lost out. Tragic loss. It was a bad choice that Lot made!

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02 -- ABRAHAM'S CHOICE

Now we will glance at two men who made a right choice.

The first is Abraham. After Lot had gone, no doubt Abraham felt rather lonely, he missed his nephew. But we read in Gen. 13:14-17 that the Lord came and spoke to Abraham. We can afford to lose anything or anybody if God will still communicate with us. In verse 14, we read:

"The Lord said to Abraham after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art." Not from the place where he once was, not from the place where he would like to be, but from the place where he was at that moment. Encouraging! Then he said, "Arise, and walk through the land, and behold the stars of heaven, and I will make thy posterity as numberless as the stars." Abraham no doubt took quite a walk. It is said that the Indians proposed to give William Penn, for a few dollars and a few trinkets, all the land that he or some of his associates could walk around in a certain number of days. So they walked for days and days and finally returned, having marked out the State of Pennsylvania; and the Indians said, "White man make big walk." Certainly! There was walking inspiration, they were walking around the rich fields and mountains full of minerals. So Abraham no doubt "made big walk."

Then we see Abraham in the plains of Mamre, sitting in his tent door in the cool of the day. And he beheld three men coming; so Abraham ran to meet them and gave them a most gracious invitation to stop with him. They accepted; who could refuse such hospitality? When entering, they asked, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" Abraham responded, "She is in the tent." Tragic if an angel should inquire of some of the brethren where their wives are now. Often they would answer, "I do not know; the last time I saw her, she had her cigarettes, and had donned her trousers or shorts, and was on her way to the city. She was running for magistrate, she may have gotten elected." But we will get off of that!

Abraham ran and brought a calf, fresh and good, and had one of his young men to dress it, and Sarah made cakes on the hearth. And Abraham served Jesus and the two angels a wonderful meal. Sometimes it is asked, "Can we eat in Heaven?" Well, for your encouragement I think so, for Jesus ate after His resurrection, and if some folks thought they could not eat in Heaven they would let up in their race and not make another effort! But Abraham served a sumptuous repast -- veal, cakes, cooked by Sarah on the hearth, and butter. Sarah was a real cook, she was no flapper. Abraham said, "I will set a morsel before you." A whole calf, cakes, and butter Abraham called a "morsel." Webster says a morsel is "a small bite," It would be nice to take a full meal with Abraham.

Then the two angels left, but the Lord tarried with Abraham. And the Lord began to reveal to Abraham the purpose of these heavenly visitors. They had come down to check up on Sodom, and see if existing conditions corresponded with the cry that came up to Heaven. Doubtless Abraham was thinking of his much-loved nephew Lot in Sodom. So Abraham drew near and stood yet before the Lord, and here we have that most wonderful intercessory prayer recorded. It is found in Gen. 18:23-33. Abraham said, "Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." Then Abraham said: "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous."

God was leading Abraham, but Abraham was also a born psychologist. He did not say, If there be forty-five righteous, but said, If it lacks five of the fifty. And the Lord said, "If this

number be found, we will spare the entire city." Then Abraham said, "Peradventure there should be forty righteous;" and the Lord said, "I will not do it if forty righteous be found." Then Abraham said, "There may be thirty righteous ones in Sodom;" and the Lord said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." And then Abraham said, "It may be that only twenty righteous will be found there." And the Lord said, "I will not do it for twenty's sake." And Abraham said, "Oh, let not the Lord be angry with me, and I will speak but this once; Peradventure ten righteous shall be found there;" and the Lord said, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake." Doubtless Abraham thought that with Lot and his family surely there would be ten righteous, and so we read: "Abraham left off speaking to the Lord." Some criticize Abraham for ceasing his prayer, but we think he was praying in the Holy Ghost and that was as far as the Holy Ghost would permit him to go. We can pray effectively only as the Holy Ghost inspires the prayer. Wonderful choice Abraham made!

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03 -- MOSES' CHOICE

The second man we notice who made a right choice is Moses. It is said Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Sin does afford temporary pleasure, but at last it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Moses lived a hundred twenty years, and his life was most eventful. There were three periods of forty years each in the life of Moses. The first forty were spent in Pharaoh's court, the second forty as a shepherd feeding the flock, and the last forty he was pastor of that Israelitish church. Here we have great sympathy for Moses and, in one sense, if you will forgive me, I'll say I have a little something on Moses. He was pastor for forty years, but I exceeded Moses by two years, being pastor forty-two years. So I have great respect for Moses as pastor of that murmuring crowd. He simply could not calm them down. He would get them pacified and satisfied, and they would break out in a new place. They may have been Wesleyan Methodist, Pilgrim Holiness, or Free Methodist, but I am inclined to think they were largely Nazarenes!

On one occasion water was scarce, and they murmured, and the Lord said to Moses, "Smite the rock." This Moses did, and water came forth. Some time later they were again murmuring about water, and the Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the rock." But Moses was provoked, and he smote the rock twice. The Lord gave water, but was greatly grieved with Moses. Moses was impatient, angry.

But you ask, "Why was he angry with Moses for smiting the rock the second time?" That is easily answered. The rock typified Jesus. He is our Rock, and Jesus is not to be smitten twice; He has been crucified, and we must not crucify Him afresh. But the Lord said to Moses, "You shall not be permitted to enter Canaan, because you failed to sanctify, or glorify, me at the rock." This greatly grieved Moses, and he continually spoke to the Lord about permitting him to enter Canaan. But one day the Lord said, "Speak to me no more about this matter, it is settled." Poor Moses, after dealing with that crowd so long. You know there were times when neither the Lord nor Moses would own that murmuring, fussing crowd. The Lord would say, "Moses, they are thy people," but Moses would respond, "No, Lord, they are Thine whom Thou hast brought out of Egypt."

But the Bible says, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Psa. 37:4. The Bible makes it clear that every Holy Ghost desire of the human heart shall be satisfied somewhere. "Say not God hath not heard thy prayer, for thou shalt have thy desire sometime, somewhere." Many are the unsatisfied desires of God's saints in this world, but do not be discouraged. Many have a hard time keeping the wolf from the door. Take depression days for example, but do not be discouraged. If we are true we shall one day walk on golden streets, not gold-paved streets, but pure solid gold. The old woman who had been compelled to stint in about everything one day saw the ocean, and as she beheld the gigantic, rolling waves, she cried out hilariously, "Thank God for one thing there is plenty of." So in Heaven there will be no stinting, but an abundance of everything.

Some have longed for Christian fellowship, and have been compelled to dwell with lions, and hyenas. I mean lions and hyenas with two feet, but they roar and scream. But one day, if we are true, in that heavenly world we shall have Abraham, Daniel, Paul, Peter, and a host of all ages for neighbors. Wonderful fellowship! Some long for rest, but never find it in this world. Charles Wesley sang:

"There I shall bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast."

Be nice to take a bath, not in a tub or even in the lake, but in the sea of heavenly rest. Job said, "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest." The hymnist sang:

"In the Christian's home in Glory
There remains a land of rest,
There my Savior's gone before me
To fulfill my soul's request."

Thank God for the land of rest. Every problem solved, every burden lifted, every tear wiped away. Home, Home to stay.

A final glance at Moses. He certainly desired to go to Canaan, but was not permitted. But some hundreds of years later he was present at the transfiguration of Jesus. This occurred over toward the middle of Canaan. And we read, "There were Moses and Elias." Moses had finally arrived in his desired land. He had to go around by the way of Heaven to get this desire satisfied, but it was finally done. So with us in this world we may die, or Jesus may come in person, and we may meet Him with many unsatisfied desires; but never mind, they will all be realized somewhere.

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CONCLUSION

Thank God for Abraham and Moses who made right choices. May we not, like Lot, make a wrong choice and possibly be wrecked in time and in eternity; but may we, by the grace of God, like Abraham and Moses, make a right choice which will ultimately mean a home in Heaven. And the most glorious aspect of Heaven is its eternity, It will never end.

"When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun."

And we shall praise Him through this endless eternity that we made a right choice. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Soon it will be too late to choose.

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THE END