

Following His Dream for Your Life

Online Sermon:

http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

There are many great wonders in this world but certainly one of the most beautiful but challenging of them is a maze found in Venice, Italy called the Villa Pisani Labirinto. Designed by Girolamo Frigimelica in the early 1700s this



“classical medieval circular maze of nine concentric patterns and many dead ends” was so intimidating and challenging that Napoleon got lost in it and Hitler and Mussolini were too afraid to enter it at all!¹ What makes this one of the most

difficult mazes in the world to navigate is not only its intricate pathways but also its hedges that are too dense to go through and too high to see over. This maze reminds me of the never ending, unknown, almost infinite pathways of life we as Christians must navigate! Living in an interconnected world of constant texting, internet browsing and international news one is constantly being bombarded with so many “voices of

choices” that knowing with certainty which are the right paths to take seems to be an exercise in futility. And while the world would have us chase after money, fame, and power this makes little sense considering such endeavors are temporary and of little value considering the eternity God has placed within our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11)! Scripture states that the overall goal of life is to please God (2 Corinthians 5:9-11) by “striving towards becoming spiritually mature and attaining the full measure of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). While knowing this overarching goal is of enormous value to us this still begs the question of what does God-approved decision-making look like when each of His own are given spiritual gifting and assigned unique divine tasks to accomplish (1 Corinthians 12)?

While we know finding the right paths to take in the maze called life is found through much prayer and fasting to prepare one’s heart to listen to God’s often gentle whisper and command to go and serve in His name, many believers still wander aimlessly in the maze of life simply because they are too enamored with their own path that seems so very right in their own sight!

The following sermon is going to give several examples of Biblical characters who when hearing God’s call obeyed and as a result got to participate in a divine role in His kingdom that far outlasted their time on this earth!

¹ Taken from the following website:

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/villa-pisani-labirinto>

“The Walls Come Down”

Joshua was called by God to lead the children on Israel to take the Promised Land. It had been forty years since he and the other eleven spies first surveyed the land (Numbers 14:34). While it truly was a land filled with milk and honey, Joshua still remembered both him and Caleb tearing their clothes in disgust (14:6) because the other spies saw the size of the people and fortified cities and became too scared to follow God’s plan



for their lives (13:28)! As Joshua came near to Jericho some forty years later, he looked up and saw the commander of the Lord’s army standing before him with a drawn sword (Joshua 5:13). Joshua fell face down in reverence,

removed his sandals, for he was standing on holy ground (5:14-15); and intently listened to what the Lord had to say about conquering Jericho. The Lord told him that Jericho had already been delivered into his hands if he followed His plan of judgment upon the nation (6:2). For six days he was to have the army march around the walls of the city and have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day he was to march around the city seven times with the priests blowing the trumpets. Up until this time Joshua told the army not to speak a single word (6:10) until they heard a long blast on the trumpets and then they were to shout, and the walls of the city would collapse, and victory would be theirs (6:3-5). God gave Joshua a path to take that required incredible

faith. He could have devised his own plan to conquer Jericho steeped in military strategy but instead chose to trust in God to come good on His promise!

Like Joshua often the path that God presents for our lives may not seem wise by human standards but in faith will lead to pleasing Him, which is the reason for which we exist!

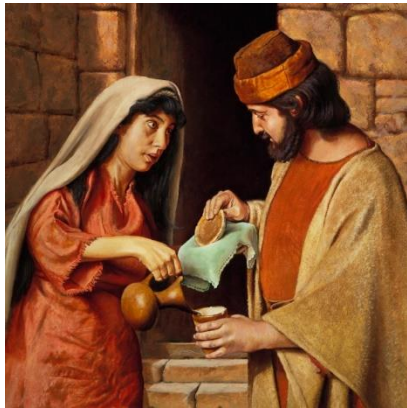
Had Joshua said “NO” to God when he saw the giants in the land of Canaan would he not have perished like all the other Israelites who lacked faith? The choices we make in life matter to God!

“Putting Others First”

Because King Ahab had “done more evil in the eyes of the Lord than those before him” (1 Kings 16:30) God told Elijah to announce His wrath upon Israel, “no dew nor rain in the next few years” (17:1). The Lord then told Elijah to flee to the Kerith Ravine where God instructed ravens to bring him bread (17:4) but when the water dried up in the brook God told him to go to Zarephath in the region of Sidon (17:2-9) and request food from a widow. When Elijah saw the widow gathering sticks, he asked her for something to drink and a piece of bread to eat (17:10-11).

She explained to Elijah that all she had was a “handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug” that was about to be used to prepare the last supper for her and her child before they die (17:12).

The prophet told her don't be afraid for if she granted this request to take care of the servant of God the “jar of flour would not be used up and the jug of oil would not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land” (17:13-14). What would you say to a request from God that puts others first and



at the expense of your own well being or that of your family? When God asks us to walk in faith to do something that requires the miraculous how many times does our “human foolishness” get in the way of His ways that are so much better than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9)? In essence Elijah was asking the widow to trust in the Lord, lean not

upon her own understanding but in all ways acknowledge His right to rule her life and He would make her paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6). The widow in this story gave the prophet of God her last meal and in doing so not only did she have food to eat every day but also when her son became ill and died Elijah cried out to the Lord and he was raised from the dead (17:17-24)! Had the widow said “NO” to the Lord's request to feed Elijah would she not have prepared her last meal and both her

and her son died shortly thereafter? While you are unlikely to be asked by God to make a physical life and death decision like this one, does not every broad path that we take in life not lead to spiritual deadness because we have missed the mark to please our Lord? The choices we make in life matter to God!

“Course Corrections”

When Napoleon navigated the maze at Villa Pisani he probably felt he was going in the right direction right up until he hit numerous dead ends and realized he had lost all sense of direction. Life is a sea of never-ending choices and when we



feel we are the masters of our own destiny that is when we are wandering away from our Lord! A good example of a person in the Bible who lost their way was Apostle Paul. Paul was circumcised on the eighth day, a

descendant of Abraham and of the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5), a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25), and a Biblical scholar trained at the feet of a well-known scholar of this day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). By his own admission Paul believed he had advanced in Judaism beyond many of his own age and was extremely zealous for Jewish traditions (Galatians 1:14). At the time Paul was so convinced his love to protect the temple, Torah and traditions of his people was the right path to take that when Christ announced entry into the kingdom of God was

based solely on faith in a risen Savior (John 3:16) he rejected the Son of God's path, persecuted and tried to destroy the early Christian church (1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatian 1:13; Philippians 3:6). For example, in trying to make his path "right" Paul went from one Synagogue to another and if the Christians would not blaspheme the Son of God he had them put into prison and often casted his vote to have them put to death (Acts 26:10-11)! It was not until he heard the words of the Lord, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me," that he repented and accepted the Lord's mission for his life which was ironically to preach the Good News to the Gentile and Jewish people in the face of them persecuting him (Acts 9)!

From Paul we learn how important it is to be constantly listening too and allowing God to change our goals and dreams in life. In the maze of life's never-ending choices, we often get confused, turned around and are heading for a spiritual dead end. How desperately we need to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd who leads and "guides us on the right paths for His name's sake" (Psalms 23:3).

While had Paul said "NO" to the Lord on the road to Damascus he would likely have lived a famous, rich life as a well-respected Pharisee, he would not have testified to kings the Good News (Acts 9), nor would he have had the privilege of planting so many churches or even running the race well and receiving crowns of righteousness (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). The choices we make in life matter to God!

"Doing a 180 Degree Turn"

With God's help not only can we make course corrections but can also do a full 180 degree turn! The Chronicler tells us that when Manasseh was twelve years old, he became king and reigned in Jerusalem for fifty years (2 Chronicles 33:1). Not only did he choose his own self-righteous path but also one that was in complete utter defiance of God! For instance, "he rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals,



made Asherah poles, and bowed down to the starry hosts and worshipped them" (33:3). If this was not evil enough, he built altars in the temple of the Lord and

"sacrificed his children in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced divination and witchcraft, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists" (33:4-6). Manasseh had shed so much innocent blood that the prophet Jeremiah stated, "he filled Jerusalem end to end with it" (2 Kings 21:16)! To make matters worse he not only followed the evillest path in life he could possibly find but also "led Judah and the people astray" to join him (2 Chronicles 33:9). Since Manasseh and his people refused to repent God got the army commanders of the king of Assyria to put a hook in his nose and bound with bronze shackles he was taken as a prisoner to Babylon (33:10-11). This was not the end of Manasseh's story for in his distress he humbled himself and sought greatly repentance from the Lord (33:13). In grace and mercy God not only forgave but also allowed Manasseh to return to Jerusalem as their king.

Manasseh then proceeded to get rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the Lord (33:15).

From Manasseh we hear a stern warning that God will not be trifled with for He is more than capable of disciplining and bringing us back onto the right path! While we don't dare minimize God's wrath in this story neither should we ignore the wonders of redemption and restoration! God is truly full of grace and mercy and when we offer Him a contrite and broken heart, He forgives our sins and places us on the righteous path that is a sweet fragrance, holy and pleasing unto Him.

Had Manasseh said “NO” to God’s warning would he not have died in the Babylonian prison without having served the Lord with righteousness?

Conclusion

We have but one life to live and the choices we make in life truly matters to our Lord! The maze of life is filled with never ending, unknown, almost infinite pathways that we must navigate. We must not let life merely happen nor should we follow the many “voices of choices” this world has to offer. God has placed eternity in our hearts so that we might look up and see the One who alone enables us to go on our uniquely defined path that He has in advance prepared us to take! We learned a lot today from people in the Bible who let the Good

Shepherd lead them. From Joshua we learned that whatever task God asks us to do we are to humbly but with great confidence obey Him for what God speaks, He enables and always makes happen. From the widow we learned how



important it is to have faith that since God’s ways are greater and better than our ways when asked to serve others at the expense of our own well-being we are to trust and obey His call for our lives is always the right choice.

From Apostle Paul we learn how important it is to make course corrections when God asks! Like Paul we often get so enamoured with trying to be the master’s of our own destiny that when God asks us to take another route we defiantly refuse and end up going against Him. And finally, from Manasseh we learn that while God disciplines those He loves He also offers grace and mercy. Praise be to God that no matter how bad we get lost in the labyrinth called life by making bad or even defiant choices against our Creator, if we humble ourselves and repent the Good Shepherd will not only forgive but find us in the darkest, deepest pits that our choices have thrown us into and place us once again on a sure foundation, the right path that is truly a holy and sweet fragrance unto Him!