

## “Life is a Choice” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

My wife, Yumi talks to her mother in Japan over phone, maybe once or twice every week. She wants to share the Gospel with her mother. One evening, after she hanged up her phone, she was kind of sad, because she noticed that they talked about the Coronavirus issues most of the time, and she just realized instead of sharing peace and hope, she was sharing her frustration and complaint about how unwise Japanese government was in their countermeasure against coronavirus. And, one scripture came to her, that was, “Your words show what is in your hearts. (Matt 12:34 CEV)” She humbly accepted it, and came back to God, and repented, and asked his help to re-organize her life, putting him at the center of her day, asking Him to fill her with His peace, love, and hope. Now that has become her main focus in this battle.

We’re in the series of “The Tree of Life,” studying on the Pentateuch. Together we’re learning essential things to live fullness of Christian life and get vital, indispensable essence to grow in maturity to become all that God wants us to be. Today is the third message of the series.

God created us, human beings, in His image (Gen 1:27). Originally, humans could have the perfect peace with God. People could be with God, and talk with Him. But because of humans’ sin, their relationship was broken. And God began to call man to come back to him. “Where are you? Why are you hiding from me?” And he promised that he would prepare salvation.

Throughout history God has been reaching out to man, trying to reconcile man to Himself. God has chosen to progressively reveal His nature, His character and His will to man, so that man might know love and fellowship with God just as he was created to do so. And, that is the main theme of the Pentateuch.

Today, we will look at three different individuals in the Pentateuch, and study how God is calling people to Himself, and how people may respond to God. Life is a choice.

### 1. Adam

The first person is the first man, Adam.

### Genesis 1:15-17 (NIV)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

God said, "Don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because if you eat of its fruit you will surely die. Don't choose death, but choose life."

But as we all know, they ate its fruit. So, did the story end there? Both Adam and Eva ate its fruit. Then, did they die immediately? No. Actually from there, a new story began, the story of God's redemption started.

Man denied God's Word, and followed his own mind. But God gracefully gave man a second chance to come back to him, listen to him, follow him, and live with him. And, this is not forced, but can be received by man's free choice.

### Genesis 3:8-10

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup> He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

"Where are you?" God doesn't ask the information, in which place they are. He knows it. Here, God is asking man, why are you hiding from me? Why are you afraid of me? The man understood his point, so he gave a kind of answer, but avoided to talk about the main point.

Men try to hide or deny that they are sinners. They want to say they are not sinners. They try not to be sinners. They try to look good. However, no matter how many good things we do or learn, the nature of sin is still there. We can't change it.

So, God continues.

### Genesis 3:11-12

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”<sup>12</sup> The man said, “The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Again, God didn't ask the man to give him the information. He knew everything clearly. So, why did God ask the man? What was he trying to do with the man?

God is helping the man to acknowledge that he did something wrong. God is leading him to ask forgiveness and change his mind to follow God. God is helping the man to see that he is guilty, and there is no way for him to save himself, and he needs a savior. Otherwise, he will continue to be afraid of God, and hide from God who is the source of life. He will forever be separated from God, and have no relationship with Him who is peace and love, truth and righteousness. His life may not have peace and love, truth and righteousness, that we call hell.

Man did wrong. He denied God, put himself above God, and follow his own way. He chose death. But God gave him a second chance, to come back to him. It's called repentance. “God's kindness leads you toward repentance” (Rom 2:4). Life is a choice.

## **2. Pharaoh**

The second person is Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. In Exodus, there is this exchange between Moses and Pharaoh.

God sent Moses to Pharaoh to tell him to set Israelites free for God. God not only made Moses speak to Pharaoh, but He also caused plagues to come upon Egypt as signs. So frogs filled the country, and there was a huge outbreak of gnats.

The seventh plague was the hailstorm with thunder. It was the worst hailstorm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.

### Exodus 9:27-28

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. “This time I have sinned,” he said to them. “The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.”<sup>28</sup> Pray to the Lord, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go; you don't have to stay any longer.”

Moses left Pharaoh, and he spread out his hands towards the Lord and prayed. Then the thunder and hail stopped.

#### Exodus 9:34-35

When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. <sup>35</sup> So Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go.

Then the eighth plague happened. The wind brought a great swarm of locusts to the land of Egypt. The locusts devoured everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees.

#### Exodus 10:16-17

Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. <sup>17</sup> Now forgive my sin once more and pray to the Lord your God to take this deadly plague away from me."

But Pharaoh hardened his heart and he would not let the Israelites go.

We can learn very important truths from Pharaoh. He showed what is not repentance.

(1) Remorse is not repentance.

We regret over failure and mistakes. When things didn't go as we wanted, when we ended up being punished as a result of what we did, we would regret for what we have done with deep sorrow. However, remorse is not repentance.

(2) Confession of sin itself is not repentance.

We admit that we have done wrong and express it with our mouth. That is confession of sin. But that itself is not repentance. Confession of sin can be a part of repentance, but it is not the essence of repentance.

In short, repentance is a radical change of mind and complete change of life direction.

We can either turn back to God or continue our old way of life. There is no other choice. If you say, "I'm gradually turning back to God," after all, you are

continuing your old way of life. If you are thinking, “I don’t want to sin. But how close can I come near sin? How long can I remain in temptation?” actually, you have no intention to come close to God. Actually you want to keep your old way of life.

There is another important thing Pharaoh shows us here. If you harden your heart, you will miss the opportunity to repent.

We find in the Bible, “The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex 4:21; 7:3, 13, 22; 8:19; 9:12, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4). You may think, “If God hardened his heart, it’s not Pharaoh’s fault, isn’t it?” But this kind of idea suggests that human beings are like robots. Robots move according to the program installed into them. Some robots rescue people, while other robots kill people according to their respective programs. It may be true with robots, but human beings are not robots. God doesn’t treat human beings like robots.

The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart because “Pharaoh’s heart was stubborn. (7:14; 8:15)” God saw that Pharaoh was arrogant and stubborn, so He let Pharaoh remain as he was.<sup>1</sup> Pharaoh’s heart was manipulated by God only after Pharaoh himself had displayed arrogance and a stubborn streak. Through the first five plagues, Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

#### Romans 1:21-24 (NIV)

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ...<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity.

#### Hebrews 12:7 (NRSV)

You know that later, when he [Esau] wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, even though he sought the blessing with tears.

“He found no place for repentance. (NASB)” If we harden our heart, we will miss the opportunity to repent. And, that could be your last chance. “So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as

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<sup>1</sup> Ari Kahn, *A River Flowed from Eden: Torah for the Shabbat Table*, (Kindle version, 2015), 59.

you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert. (Heb 3:7-8 NIV)"  
Life is a choice.

### 3. Balaam

The third person is Balaam. Numbers chapter 22 through 24 record about this person.

It was when Israel's wandering in the desert was drawing to an end. The Israelites were camping along the Jordan across from Jericho, in the plains of Moab.

The Moabites knew that before they reached there, the Israelites fought with Amorites, defeated them and took possession of their whole land. Balak, king of Moab was terrified, so he sent messengers to summon Balaam to curse Israel.

Responding to the invitation, Balaam saddled his donkey and left for Moab with Balak's messengers. On their way, Balaam's donkey crouched down and stopped moving. Balaam was angry and beat the donkey. Then, the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you? Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?"

And the Lord opened Balaam's eyes. He saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. The angel said to him, "You have strayed from the right path before me. If the donkey hadn't turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now."

Balaam replied, "I have sinned. Now if you are displeased, I will go back." The angel of the Lord said to him, "Go with them, but speak only what I tell you." So Balaam went with them to Balak. And his action there shows if his repentance was true or not. Let's continue to look at the story.

Balak built great altars, and prepared sacrifices. He expected Balaam to curse Israel. But Balaam blessed Israel once, twice and third times. So, Balak's anger burned against Balaam. He said to him, "I summoned you to curse my enemies, but you have blessed them these three times!"

Balaam answered, "Did I not tell you, 'Even if you gave me your palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything of my own accord, to go beyond the command of the Lord. I must say only what the Lord says?'"

Balaam repented. His actions show that he turned to God, and made God his Lord, his Master, a person in charge.

Repentance is to make a 180 degree turn-around in the way of life. We have been living according to the current of the world, our own desire, wish, preference, plan and viewpoint. But we stop this way of living, and turn to God, this is repentance. And to turn to God is to make Jesus our Lord, our Master.

Some of you might feel uncomfortable with this “repentance and the lordship of Jesus.” You might think it’s too hard, it’s too much cost for you. If you have that kind of feeling or thinking, actually you totally miss the meaning of the gospel.

Think about Balaam. As he wandered off the path of the Lord, he could have been killed immediately by the angel of the Lord as he deserved. But he was given a chance to live by God’s mercy, through his donkey. That shouldn’t be taken it granted.

We are the same as he. We must remember that we were all sinners before God. We can’t do anything for our sin. We were just going to receive the anger of God, the eternal punishment, the eternal death. But Jesus took all God’s anger in our place.

Although I had been God’s enemy, I had turned against God, I had been ignoring God, I had just troubled God, but He still loved me and died on the cross, to reconcile me with Himself. He did the same for you. He paid all the cost for you, sought after you, called you, and invited you to come back to Him. It’s not to punish you, but He wants to have the closest relationship with you for eternity. You must understand that it doesn’t cost you anything to repent or come back to God, but it costs Him the life of Jesus.

#### **4. Life is a Choice**

Right before the Israelites were about to cross the Jordan into the Promised land, God spoke to them like this:

##### Deuteronomy 30:19-20

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your

children may live <sup>20</sup> and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God is telling us to choose life. Life is a choice. And, how can we choose life? Repentance. Turn to God, and make him your Lord for your whole life, love him, listen to him and hold fast to him, because He is your life.

Friends, please don't misunderstand me; we will not become perfect the moment we repent.

By the cross of Jesus, the salvation has been completed. We don't need to do or add anything to be saved. We just receive it by faith. However, we don't instantly reach maturity of holiness the moment we are saved, the moment we are born again.

### 2 Corinthians 3:18

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

We have turned to God through repentance. And day by day we are being transformed into the image of Jesus from glory to glory by the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, repentance is the beginning of the new life.

When you repent, you replace the foundation of your life. You delete your old foundation completely. And then you make Jesus the new foundation of your life. After that, whatever you do, you do it on the foundation, Jesus. So, repentance is not just one-time-religious-turning-point, rather, it's moment-by-moment attitude, day-by-day experience of the power of the cross.

When you repented, you began to have close relationship with Him. It should make changes in your life. It's just like when you start dating with a boyfriend or girlfriend, many things should be changed: the place you go, how you spend your day off, the kind of books you read, the kind of music you listen to, the clothes you wear, and even the way you talk may be changed.

Although you don't become perfect the moment you repent, but there should be some changes in your life. It should appear in your way of life that now Jesus has become the center of your life, because what is inside of you will come

out naturally. Just as a banana tree bears bananas, so you will naturally bear the fruits of Jesus because He lives in you.

Repentance gives us the foundation of our faith. If it is half-done, no matter what you put on top of it, your life cannot be solid and reliable. If it is unfinished, no matter what you put on top of it, your life is unstable, insecure, and easy to collapse. How about your repentance? Is he your life? Life is a choice.

### **For self-reflection**

1. Have you ever felt God is calling you, "Where are you? Why are you hiding from me?"? What kind of situation were you in? How did you respond?
2. Look at three life examples: Adam, Pharaoh, and Balaam. Can you see any traits from each of them in your life?
3. Write down your first experience of repentance. (If you notice that you've not repented yet, this may be a divine opportunity for you to start a new life.)
4. In what sense can repentance be seen as one-time-religious-turning-point? And, in what sense can repentance be a moment-by-moment attitude, day-by-day experience of the power of the cross?