

October 18, 2015

Six Decisions

The Decision to Mature

John 4:4-24

Opening words: According to some, the average person makes more than 35,000 decisions in a single day. Most of them are rather simple: where to sit, what to eat for breakfast, what lane to drive in, should I have another cup of coffee, etc. These decisions are easily made and have very few consequences. Other decisions are more serious, with long-lasting effects. Some decisions have an eternal influence. It is those decisions that we are looking at in this sermon series, *Six Decisions*.

After a few weeks off, I am returning to the six major decisions that influence your discipleship. We have already covered the first two, the decision to follow and the decision for a new life. In the weeks to come, we will look at the decision to respond, the decision to persevere and the decision to surrender. Today, we look at the decision to mature. These decisions are not original. They came from Tom Berlin, who is the Senior Pastor of the Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Virginia. He compiled these six decisions in his book, 6 Decisions that will Change Your Life. Our scripture lesson for today is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, John 4:4-26.

John 4:4-26 ⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" ¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me,

a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." ²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

In 1849, the Japanese painter Hokusai died at the age of 89. His work spanned decades. Toward the end of his life, the artist dismissed any of his work done before the age of 50. It was only after he reached 70, that he felt like he was turning out anything worthy of note. On his deathbed Hokusai lamented, "If heaven had granted me five more years, I could have become a real painter." His story is the story of maturity. Can I ask you two questions? First, are you getting better, or just getting older? Second, are you maturing spiritually as you grow older? If those two questions make you think, say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves this morning in the fourth chapter of John. According to the very first verse of our reading, Jesus is in Samaria, near the town of Sychar. It is about noon and the Master was near Jacob's well (Ge. 48:21-22). The Master was warm from his journey, so he approached the well for a cool drink of water. Normally, people drew water from the well at the end of the day because the heat had passed. Jesus must have been surprised to see a woman at the well during the hottest time of the day. At first sight he knew she must have a story. In his culture, men and women did not address each other in public; in his society, Jews and Samaritans did not speak at all. Jesus breaks both rules and talks to a Samaritan woman. The majority of our reading is a dialogue between the two.

The Samaritan woman must have been filled with regret because her life was filled with mistakes. She just couldn't find a decent man; she was a repeat offender. She had been married five times and was living with another man. In our society, only fifty percent of first time marriages last. Every time you marry, your chances of a successful marriage are cut in half. That means, on her fifth wedding day her chances of a happy marriage were down to 3.1%. If she would have married number six, it was down to 1.6%. She was at the well in the middle of the day alone to hide from the harsh tongues of the other women in the community. She was the punchline of every joke in her community and she knew it. This is the oddest thing about the story. Jesus chooses this mistake-filled woman to talk about spiritual maturity.

Jesus and the Samaritan woman must have been quite a scene. They were a study in contrast. Just think about it for a moment. He was a man, she was a woman. He was a Jew, she was a Samaritan. He was sinless, she was sinful. He was spiritually mature,

she was spiritually immature. This is the truth. We are much more like the sinful woman than the sinless Savior. Our world and our churches are filled with sinful, spiritually immature people. I have never met a sinless person; I have met very few spiritually mature people. Spiritually mature people stand out in our society because there are so few. Can I ask you these questions? Do the people in your life consider you spiritually mature? Do you consider yourself spiritually mature? The Samaritan woman struggled with Jesus's words because she was spiritually immature. Could it be we struggle with God's ways because we are spiritually immature? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Recently, I discovered a website, *Cripplegate.com*. It is a Christian website with the tag line, "for a new generation of non-conformists. (I consider myself a non-conformist.) That line plays off Roman 12:1-2, "*do not conform to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" On November 7, 2011, they posted an article called: 5 Signs of Spiritual Maturity. That article seemed to be written for us. The article revolves around five questions. If you can answer these five questions honestly, then you will discover your level of Christian maturity. Each one of these questions has Biblical roots. You may find out that you are more mature than you thought. You may discover you have some work to do. You can consider these five questions a little quiz.

This is question number one. **Do you have an appetite for meat?** Infants drink milk regularly, but in time they ask for solid food. When a twenty-one year old asks his mother to spoon feed him mashed potatoes, it is creepy and dysfunctional. When a nursing home resident can't take a single bite, it is sad because the end is near. Spiritually mature people can't get enough meat. They can't get enough of the Bible. They study the Gospels. They study the entire Old Testament. They study the epistles. What part of the Bible are you studying right now? Are you studying the Bible? Have you ever really studied the Bible? Or is the Bible just too hard to understand? Maybe that is the reason you are spiritually immature. Spiritually mature people have an appetite for meat. Hebrews 5:14 says, "*Solid food is for the mature.*" If you think you can remember this point, say, **"Amen!"**

This is question number two. **Are you easily offended?** Experience has taught us that mature Christians seldom get offended. The reason is simple, they see the big picture. When Jesus turned the tables over because people were using the law for personal gain, people were upset with him. Jesus didn't care, because he saw the big picture. The temple was a house of prayer, not a place of profit. Do you see the big picture, or do you only see yourself or your interests? You may have heard me say this in the past. The only thing that matters is Jesus! Our churches are filled with offended people because our churches are filled with spiritually immature people. Philippians 1:18 says, "*In every way Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes. I will rejoice.*" If you think you can remember this point, say, **"Amen!"**

This is question number three. **Is your conscience formed by scripture or opinion?** One of the great attributes of a mature Christian is grace. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. It is a simple truth to understand, but it is a hard truth to live out. I have grown tired of negative, critical and judgmental people. No one needs your permission; no one has to live up to your standards. Spiritually immature people are always critical of others. Spiritually mature people understand that we are saved by grace. Romans 14:1 says, *"As for one who is weak in the faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions."* If you think you can remember this point, say, **"Amen!"**

This is question number four. **Do you serve humbly?** God uses sinners in this world to do good things because there is no one else to choose. Have you ever known anyone who boasted about what they did for their church? Have you ever known someone who boasted of something they did for God in this world? If so, then you have the perfect example of a spiritually immature person. Spiritually mature people get it. They know it is not about us, it is all about God. Do the people in your life consider you humble? 2 Corinthians 4:7 says, *"We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."* Do the people in your life consider you arrogant? If you think you can remember this point, say, **"Amen!"**

This is question number five. **Do you credit God for success?** We live in a culture that idolizes people. It may be a well-loved pastor or the pope. It maybe a historical figure, like George Washington or John Wesley. That is a true sign of spiritual immaturity. Spiritually mature people understand the truth. People, both contemporary and historical, are nothing more than tools in the hands of God. It is God who deserves all the credit. I Corinthians 3:7 says, *"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."* If you think you can remember this point, say, **"Amen!"**

So how did you do with your little quiz? Did you find you are a spiritually mature person? Or did you find you have some work to do?

When I was young my grandmother came to visit us twice a year. She lived in Brooklyn, New York and we lived in Warren. I can remember going to the Greyhound bus station to pick her up. Later, she flew into the Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport. It really didn't matter where she arrived. It was always exciting to pick her up because she came with gifts. Every reunion was the same. I would run up to her and give her a big hug. She would always square my shoulders and say, "Let me look at you. You have gotten so big." My dad, who hated those visits because he didn't like her, always responded, "I would hope so. If he wasn't growing there would be something wrong." I think he missed the point, but he wasn't wrong. We expect healthy children to grow.

One of my lingering memories of my trip to Russia came from the orphanage. Remember, that orphanage in Dmitrov, Russia houses approximately one hundred emotionally, physically and mentally disturbed children. Each one of those children has

a story. One of the boys in the orphanage stood about four foot tall. That would be fine if he was a preschooler, but he was a teenager. I don't remember his name, but my heart went out to him. He stood with crutches and always had a smile on his face. The other children liked him and considered him a leader. Every time I saw him, I wondered what was wrong. We expect healthy children to grow. This is the truth.

God expects you to grow, and God expects you to mature spiritually! When God looks at you does he say, "Look how big you have gotten!" Or does God say, "What is wrong?" Never forget, we are to be a little more like Jesus every day. It is your choice. Are you going to mature, or are you going to remain a spiritual babe?

Will you pray with me?