

Sunday #2 Decision

by J. Edwin Orr

The speaker emphasizes the importance of decision-making in the Christian faith, highlighting the need for a change of attitude and a commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

Duration: 40:52

Scripture: Acts 26:19-20, Romans 10:8, Romans 10:12-14, Colossians 2:9

Topics: "Decision"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of repentance in the message of the gospel. He mentions that although the word 'repent' is not explicitly mentioned in the six verses he references, the apostle Paul never gave up preaching repentance. The preacher shares personal anecdotes to illustrate the significance of getting the facts right and the importance of making decisions. He then delves into the questions of who must decide, why, how, what the decision involves, and where and when these decisions take place, all of which can be found in the six verses he references.

Transcript

I would be glad if you would remember my ministry in your prayer. I'm over the three score years and ten now, into my seventy-second year. Naturally at that age you begin to number your days.

I want to use them for the best, and my first priority is to write, because after I write, what I write may be read after I've gone. On top of that, a pastor of one of the largest churches in California, who has about ten thousand attending a Sunday, asked me to come and preach one Sunday a month, and he said he would videotape the addresses. I've just tried them out.

I'm lecturing in January for three hours a day at Fuller Theological Seminary, and three hours is rather a lot to be on your feet lecturing. So I hit on the idea of lecturing for an hour, then showing one of the videotapes, while I went and had coffee, and then came back and lectured for another hour. It didn't always work.

For instance, I turned over two tapes, said I'd be gone for an hour. When I came back, instead of listening to the second tape, the students were having a prayer meeting. They'd been stirred by the first tape.

I'd be glad if you'd pray about that. Then a colleague of mine, who was actually preaching with me in 1933, as a young layman as I was, Stanley Donnan, now retired, an electronics wizard, has been trying to put

together any tapes, audio tapes, that he's found, trying to make a library of them. He's not a businessman, but I said I'd be very glad if you'd do it.

So by the way, I hope you'll send a set of the tapes from here to Mr. Donnan, or send it to me and I'll give them to him. So these are ways of extending ministry. But no one's indispensable in the Lord's work, yet I feel that whatever I've learned from the Lord about the subject of revival, I want to pass on.

Now as far as the concluding word is concerned, I have sought the Lord's guidance. I'm sure on a night like this, when there's so much snow around, most of those who have attended are already committed Christians. Yet I haven't been able to throw off the impression that I should speak on the way of salvation.

You know what the hymn says, tell me the old, old story, for those that know it best are hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest. Yet there may be someone here for whom it's meant. If for instance anyone wants to wait behind to talk to me, I'll be glad to talk to them.

So it's not possible for me to say goodbye to all my friends afterwards. I would like to thank them for their encouragement here, and I'd like to say that it's been home from home to stay with the connects in their home. I find it's quite the fashion nowadays for people to put a visiting preacher in a motel.

I don't like it. I think of the lifelong friendships I've made through staying in homes. But you know people are ready to do that, just to put granny and grandpa in an old people's home rather than have them stay around.

They put preachers off by themselves in a hotel. Some prefer it, but not me. I'm a family type.

All right then, final message tonight. Last Sunday night I spoke on repentance. Do you remember? What does the word mean? It means to change.

And I told you the first word in the mouth of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Twelve Disciples, the Seventy Disciples, the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul, is the word repent, which means to change. Now when Billy Graham went to Haringey, one of the bishops over there criticized him and said there was far too much emphasis upon decision. He said decision is not a New Testament word.

That discipleship is much more important. Well of course Billy Graham himself would have agreed that discipleship is much more important than decision. What would a decision be without discipleship? But if I'd been there, I would have told the bishop that decision is in the New Testament.

Not quite the same word, but the word repentance means a change of attitude. How could you change your attitude without so deciding? Supposing a boy decides to run away from home, he gets as far as New York, then he repents, turns right about face, comes back again. Can he do that without deciding? Of course not.

The trouble is the word repentance, because as I said, it's lost its meaning, has been replaced with this word decision. And when Billy Graham speaks of the hour of decision, he really means the hour of individual repentance. So I want to talk to you about decision.

We make decisions every day of our lives. My wife was born in Africa, the only member of our family to be naturalized. My father was an American citizen, though I was born in Ireland, I didn't need to be naturalized.

If you're born in a stable, it doesn't make you a horse, you know. I find I was an American citizen by birth, but my wife had to be naturalized. And I learned something of it.

You have to declare your intention first of all, and then after a period of residence, you take the oath of allegiance. In marriage, there's a double decision. You must have the intention, you apply for a license.

That doesn't make you married. You must declare your truth before witnesses, in a church or in a civil ceremony. When I enlisted in the Air Force, I first of all wrote to the chief of chaplains, announced my intention of becoming a chaplain.

They informed me of the requirements, and in due course I was notified to proceed to 4th Army Headquarters and take the oath as an officer. In matriculation into university, you declare your intention. The university examines your fitness, and finally you are matriculated.

They make much more of that in British universities than over here. By the way, when I was in my teens, I took the University of London matriculation examination, and the University of Chicago offered me two years' credit for it. So a matriculation certificate means something.

But it begins with an intention, ends with a declaration. These decisions don't last forever. You may decide what to have for breakfast.

That's a decision, but it's not a lasting decision. You may decide where to go to college. Once you're through, you enter the profession of your choice.

You may decide to enter military service. You do so for a period of a year's service. But when you make a decision for Christ, it's an eternal decision.

It's for this life and the life to come. Therefore I won't make an apology for speaking on life's greatest decision. You may be surprised to know that in the 10th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, there's a short passage of scripture, six verses, that deal with this subject.

I'll read them to you. Romans chapter 10, beginning at verse 8. But what does the scripture say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach. Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. The scripture says no one who puts his trust in him will be put to shame. There is no distinction between Jew and Greek.

The same Lord is Lord of all, bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Those six verses contain the kernel of the gospel.

Now, some of you may say that it didn't mention the word repent. The Apostle Paul said, Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but first at Damascus, then at Jerusalem, then throughout Judea, then to the nations. I told them they should repent and turn to God, and produce works meet for such repentance.

He never gave up preaching repentance. This is related to his main message, and I want you to take it in. Believe it or not, once I was a sports reporter in Ireland.

My editor told me once, the secret of good reporting is get the facts. You may write a clumsy sentence, we can always rewrite it. You may misspell a word, we can always correct the spelling.

But if you don't get the facts, we can't invent them. So you should always ask yourself the question, who did it? How was it done? How did it happen? What was involved? Where? When? And I'm going to take those interrogative pronouns tonight. Who must decide? Why must we decide? How do we decide? What does the decision involve? Where and when? You'll find all the answers in those six verses, keep them open before you.

Who must decide? Well, you'll find it says there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. The same Lord is Lord of all, bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. There is no distinction between Jew and Greek.

You say I'm neither Jewish nor Greek. This doesn't apply to me. But the Apostle Paul was not referring to nationality.

You may say well I'm Canadian, I'm Mexican, I'm an American citizen. You may say anything you wish to say, but he's not referring to nationality as such. There is no distinction between Jew and Greek.

In those days the Jew was the God-fearing man. So far as a personal God, a creator, is concerned, the Greeks were a godless people. They believed in many gods, the creation of their own imagination.

The Jew was the church-going man. The Greek was the pleasure-seeking man. The Jew was the religious man.

The Greek was the irreligious man. And the Apostle Paul is saying, whether you're religious or not, whether you go to church or not, whether you fear God or not, you must come to decision. This seems to hit church-going people harder than non-church-going people.

I remember in Bombay, an Indian came to me and said, Thank you, Sahib, for your sermon. I said, Thank you. He said, Are you a Christian? I said, Oh yes, I am a Christian.

He said, How long have you been a Christian? I said, I've been a Christian all my life. He said, Surely you've had some personal experience, you've been converted or confirmed your faith in some way. I said, Sahib, you do not understand.

It was not I that was converted, it was my great-great-grandfather. He was converted and brought the whole family out of Hinduism into the Christian faith. So he said, Not only am I a Christian, but I come from a long line of Christians.

I said, You know the Taj Mahal Hotel? He said, Yes. I said, Suppose you saw a young couple having breakfast there, and they look just like a honeymoon couple, and you say to the young man tactfully, Have you been married long? He said, We're not married. But our parents were married, our grandparents were married, our great-grandparents were married, and we both come from a long line of married people.

Even my Indian friend laughed at that. My father and mother brought me up with a hearty respect for holy matrimony, but it didn't make me married. That was a personal decision.

But not only in India, but in the United States. A man told me, I'm a Presbyterian from a way back. I said, From how far back? He said, The Revolutionary War.

So I said, Did you know George Washington personally? How could you be a Presbyterian from a way back? Yet that's the basis of so many people's profession. It's family religion. I just read the other day, some young fellow says, I've lost my faith.

He went to university. He said, You haven't lost your faith, the pastor said. You've lost your parents' faith.

Why don't you get one of your own? That's the point. Who must decide? Everyone, religious or non-religious, church-going or non-church-going. Believers or atheists.

Who? Everyone. That brings us to the second question. Why? Again, you'll find the answer here.

Why must this decision be made? Verse 10 says, Man believes with his heart and so is justified. He confesses with his lips and so is saved. There are two theological words, and some people don't like them.

Man, justified, saved. He believes with his heart in order to be justified. We talked about that one night.

What does it mean to be justified? To be set right. That supposes there's something wrong with us. We need to be set right.

If you want to know anything about the sinfulness of human nature, go and talk to the police or the FBI. It's more than a theological question. We know there's something wrong with human nature.

We need to be set right. We need to be saved. When we were in Brazil, my wife got a telegram from Africa to say that her sister, who had married a Baptist minister and gone to Central Africa, was critically ill, terminally ill with cancer.

My wife took the children and crossed the South Atlantic, made arrangements for the children, went up into Central Africa, and nursed her sister until she died. The doctor told her that her sister must have had cancer for about eleven years. This was surprising.

She was such a healthy woman. But then my wife remembered that some eleven years before, she claimed a backache. Apparently it had slowly metastasized.

A Melbourne specialist said something to me that sounded brutal. He said, I wish cancer hurt more. I wish it were more painful.

I said, what? He said, I wish it hurt more at the beginning when we could do something for it. That's the trouble. In its early stages, we're not aware of it.

I don't mean to harrow anyone's feelings, but perhaps one in ten listening to me has cancer. Maybe I have. And isn't that a type of sin? You don't need to be public enemy number one to be a sinner.

You do read of some shocking crimes these days, but it isn't only shocking criminals that are sinners. We're all sinners. We fall short.

Why do we need to make a decision? Because we need to be saved. The very promise is made, thou shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. Not only from the consequences of their sins, but from their sins.

We've asked two questions. Who must decide? Everyone. Why? Because we're all sinners.

So it brings us to the natural question, how do we make such a decision? You must confess with your mouth. You must have the right intention. You must give the proper declaration.

Both. Some people do one without the other. I remember at the end of World War II, a friend of mine who had fought in Montgomery's army in North Africa asked me to go to his wedding.

I went, but I was extremely ill at ease. There was something about that girl's attitude that made me uneasy. In fact, some days before the wedding, I said to him, are you sure you're doing the right thing? And he said rather crossly, it's rather late to talk about it, we're getting married on Tuesday.

I'm glad he didn't ask me to perform the ceremony, it would have been on my conscience. Well, about a month later, he came to see me and he said, I'm in trouble. I said, what's your trouble? He said, my wife.

Well, I said, you've only been married four weeks, perhaps it takes a little while to get adjusted. Look, he said, we went to Edinburgh for our honeymoon and she wouldn't even speak to me. I said, what do you mean she wouldn't speak to you? He said, she's hot, you know, like a schoolgirl.

I'm not speaking to you. I had to admit it was a bad start. So I said, are you living together like man and wife? He said, we've got an apartment.

I didn't ask you that. I said, are you living together like man and wife? No, he said, we're like two disagreeable lodgers. Oh, he said, she makes my breakfast for me.

He said, should I divorce her? I said, you don't need to divorce her. If you go to the judge and tell him what you told me, the judge will annul the marriage. It's not enough for a girl to take the vows of marriage.

She must mean it. And there's such a thing as consummation of a marriage. She must mean it.

But the opposite is also true, isn't it? When I was in business in Ireland, there was a young lady in our office, engaged to be married, but her boyfriend was one of these terribly shy fellows from the country. Every time she said, John, don't you think we ought to get married next June? He got so scared he went away and didn't come back for two weeks. When I knew then they'd been engaged 17 years.

He had bought her a lovely diamond engagement ring, but you don't even admire it if you said, oh, Ruby, what a lovely ring. She thought you were being sarcastic. She'd caught the fish, but she couldn't land him.

In fact, after the war, when I went back to my native city, one of the first things I asked when I went to see my old friends at work, whatever happened to John and Ruby? They said he was killed during the blitz. He was a gentleman with the right intention, but he wasn't willing to make the declaration. It must be both.

You must confess with your lips. You must believe in your heart. You must be prepared to say so, but you also must believe it in your heart.

I once flew into Chicago to see an old professor of mine. He said, where did you come from? I said, Los Angeles. When did you leave? I said, this morning.

He said, did this jet travel? You know, he said, when I was young, it took two and a half days by train to go to Los Angeles. I said, still it takes a couple of days. I said, Professor, you travel for the seminary in the summer.

Why don't you fly? No, he said, I go by train. But I said, Los Angeles, you'd say two days going and two days coming back. I know.

But I go by train, as nature intended, he said. Well, I said, are you scared of flying? No, he said, insurance rates are much the same for rail travel as air travel. In fact, he said, you're more in danger of being knocked down on Washington Boulevard here in Chicago.

I said, then are you afraid you might get on a plane for Los Angeles and end up in Havana? No, he said, I think they'd take me where I'm supposed to go. I said, then why don't you fly? Don't you believe in aviation? He said, yes, but not that much. Now, he believed in flying.

So did I. What was the difference? I bought my ticket, checked through the gate, walked up the ramp, found my seat, fastened my seatbelt, and committed myself to the pilot. You must confess with your lips. You must believe in your heart.

Now, perhaps the most important question is, what does this decision involve? I mean, decide about what? Again, we have it here, very clearly. If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. You see, it doesn't concern a religion.

It concerns a person. I remember speaking for InterVarsity at the University of Chicago, and a girl raised her hand, she said, I don't understand all this. If a man believes in communism, he's a communist.

If he believes in socialism, he's a socialist. She said, I believe in Christianity, am I not a Christian? I said, not necessarily so. She said, then I don't get it.

I noticed she was wearing an engagement ring, so I said, could I ask you a personal question? She said, yes. I said, do you believe in marriage? She said, obviously, I'm engaged to be married. I said, would you stand up and tell all the girls present why you believe in marriage? She kept her seat.

She said, that's too personal. Oh, I said, forget about your boyfriend. Tell us why you believe in marriage as an institution, a philosophy.

I said, no, love is blind, and marriage is the institution for the blind. She smiled, she got up, she said, I haven't given this much organized thought, but marriage gives a woman a career, a home of her own, a family of her own, social prestige. Oh, she said, there are many good reasons for marriage.

So I said, so you believe in marriage? She said, yes, sir. I said, I wonder how many girls here present believe in marriage like that. There was a lot of giggling, and then they all raised their hands except one.

I said, girls, I'm a chaplain of the United States Air Force, and I'm recognized by the state of Illinois to perform marriages. This young lady says, if you believe in communism, you're a communist. If you believe in Christianity, you're a Christian.

Now I understand you all believe in marriage. I said, why wait? Allow me to pronounce you all married. Well, there was a roar of protest.

One girl said, you're making fun of us. Another girl shouted, you've got to get a guy. Well, I said, what was wrong with what I said? This girl said, oh, Mr. Orr, marriage is not a philosophy, it's a personal relationship.

I said, exactly. To be a Christian is not a philosophy. You don't decide that Christianity is a better philosophy than Buddhism, or whatever.

You simply put your trust in a person, a living person. You must believe in your heart that he's alive right now. But you must also confess that he is the Lord.

Most people confess he was a great teacher, a great man, a great martyr. But that's not what's involved. You must confess that he is Lord.

My son David, who's now a lawyer, came home from Sunday school when he was about four, talking very cheerfully about God. God said this and God said that. God did the other thing.

I was a little curious. I said, David, what do you think God is like? He said, that's easy, Daddy. I said, easy? We were taught that God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, transcendent, immanent, immutable, immeasurable, eternal.

I said, it's easy. He said, yes, Daddy. I said, what's God like? He said, God's just like Jesus.

And I couldn't say anything better than that. He is the living revelation of God. In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

The prophet said, Thus saith the Lord. He said, Verily, verily, I say unto you. His deity is clearly taught, and this you must believe.

So it brings us to the last question. Where and when? Well, here's the word again. Verse eight.

The word is near you, on your lips, and in your heart. That is the word of faith which we preach. What word? Phillips translates it, the secret of believing.

Surely you've met somebody who seems to have the secret of believing. Sometimes you've said, I wish I had your faith. The word of faith.

The secret of believing is near you, as close as your lips and your heart. During the Battle of Manila, I was trying to sleep one night while the artillery was beating down the old wall city of Manila. The Japanese fought to the last man.

I should have tried to go to sleep first, but I like to read a little while, get comfortable, and then go to sleep. But I tried to sleep, I couldn't sleep. There were twenty-five army cops in that old tent.

Twenty-three other officers besides me. There was always one frog in the pond to start the other frogs croaking. And soon they were all snoring.

Some snored bass, some baritone, some tenor. I tried to sleep. You have no idea the wrath that rises in your throat when you try to sleep and you have a barrage of snoring.

It must have been after midnight I heard a step on the gravel path. It was a pilot looking for a bed. He had been flying all day and half the night.

All he wanted was a place to lie down. When he came underneath the tent and heard the barrage of snoring, he began to swear. He said, where is that light? Why doesn't the army do things right, bunch of morons? He said, if they're in business they'd be bankrupt.

I said, if you stand right where you are, reach out your right hand, you'll find a cord hanging there. I want to tell him, pull the cord, the light will come on. But he wouldn't let me finish.

He started swearing again. I said, don't swear at me, I'm trying to help you and you won't listen. He could have sworn all night.

It wouldn't have helped him. He could have asked me to give him a diagram of the wiring of the tent. He couldn't have seen it in the dark.

He could have asked me the nature of electricity. I wouldn't have told him even if I'd known. What did he need to do? It was within his reach.

All he needed to do was pull on the cord, the light came on, and his bad temper evaporated. He apologized for his bad language. He didn't learn when the war would end or when he'd be back stateside.

But he saw all he needed to see. That's my illustration of this. The word is near you, as close as your lips and your heart.

The secret of faith. Suppose you put it up. It's still the same decision tomorrow.

You must confess with your lips, you must believe in your heart. Suppose you say, wait till I graduate from college. Still the same decision, believe in your heart, confess with your lips.

Wait till I get married, believe in your heart, confess with your lips. Wait till I retire, confess with your lips, believe in your heart. Wait till my deathbed.

And the minister who prays with you can't tell you anything more than believe in your heart, confess with your lips. So in that sense, it's as close to you as it ever will be. As close as your lips and your heart.

The secret of believing. Yes. I was in Lapland, among the reindeer, when I decided to propose to the girl that I married.

And the trouble was, she was in Africa. So I had to propose by cable. I could hardly wait till that cable came back, and she turned me down.

But I sent another cable saying I was coming anyway. So I traveled all the way out. When I got there, I traveled away upcountry.

Finally, when I met her, I proposed to her on the station platform. And I proposed to her every day after that. She must have married me to get rid of me.

On our honeymoon, I said to her, when did you actually decide to marry me? And she said coyly, wouldn't you like to know? I said, that's why I'm asking. After all, I had proposed every day. So I was a little curious to know when.

Well, she told me it was in such and such an evening. Gosh, why didn't you tell me then? She said, I wanted to be sure. Mother advised this, my sister advised that.

Somebody else advised something else. It was a big decision to leave home and travel all around the world. Your kind of life.

She said, I want it to be my decision. So she waited till next morning, and then she told me. I'm glad she told me.

You don't like anyone else to tell you. So I said to her, let's go and tell your mother, her best friend. That night we announced our engagement.

Her brother was a station master. At dinner. When we were married, it was a public ceremony.

I had to get a special license because I traveled out a long distance and didn't live there. At the day of the wedding, she could have backed out. That's a woman's privilege.

Up to that moment, she could have backed out. But once she said it publicly, it was final. Now why do I say this? Because far too often we put the cart before the horse regarding making a decision for Christ.

Sometimes we expect people to make a public declaration before they've made a private decision. Therefore, I think I'll conclude this meeting by saying, you know enough to decide. It's as close as your lips and your heart.

Why don't you decide in your heart first? And in due course, you can let the world know. Let us bow in prayer. Who must decide? Everyone, including you.

Why? Every last one of us is a sinner, needs to be saved. How? It's too full, we believe in the heart, confess with the lips. What? That Jesus is Lord, that he's alive today.

Where and when? Here and now. Today is the day of salvation. Now is the accepted time.

You know enough to decide. So why don't you just say in your heart, I want to be a true Christian. Now if you are already a true Christian, you don't need to say that.

If I said to my wife, don't you think we ought to get married, she'd say, we are married. If you are a true Christian, you've no doubt about it, you're satisfied, you don't need to make a decision. But if you're not sure, or not satisfied, or if you frankly realize you're not converted, your life hasn't changed, you've never truly repented, changed your attitude and turned around, then you can decide right now.

Just simply tell the person most concerned, Lord, I want to be a true Christian. I've tried to make it so clear that I wouldn't need to answer any questions further. But if you've said in your heart, Lord, I want to be a true Christian, I'll be glad to pray for you.

Is there anyone here tonight who did say already, right now, Lord, I want to be a true Christian. I'd like to pray for you. How can I pray for you if you don't let me know? This is private.

I understand your feelings. But if you prayed that prayer, would you let me know simply by raising your hand quickly and taking it down again? I'll pray for you. Yes, God bless you.

Anyone else? Yes, I see your hand. Anyone else, you say, Lord, I want to be a true Christian. I'll pray for you.

Raise your hand, take it down again. Yes, I see your hand too. Anyone else? Now remember, if you are a true Christian, you don't need my prayers.

But if you're not sure, if you're not satisfied, or if you just know you're not converted, I'd be glad to pray for you. Anyone else, just raise your hand and take it down again. I'll pray for you.

Lord, we pray for those who have sought prayer, that this may become a real experience, true faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now before we close, I'd like to say something else.

I was converted on the 15th of January, 1921. And let's see, that's 62 years ago. Is there anyone here who was converted more than 62 years ago? Would you raise your hand? Alright then, let's say, is there anyone here who was converted more than 50 years ago? Would you raise your hand? Where was it? Where? In Warrilson Memorial Church, 50 years ago? 51 years ago.

I'm only going to ask one question. Are you sorry you made the decision? Never. Is there anyone here who made the decision for Christ between 40 and 50 years ago? Would you raise your hand? Yes.

Where was it? April 1933. Southport, near Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Could I ask you, are you sorry you made that decision? Anyone who made a decision for Christ between 30 and 40 years ago, would you raise your hand? Where was it? In Ohio.

Are you sorry? Anyone between 20 and 30 years ago, would you raise your hand? This lady back here, where was it? In Minnesota. Are you sorry you made that decision? Well, I don't want to prolong the questions, but anyone made a decision for Christ in 1982 or this year, 1983, would you raise your hand? Where was it? Right here. Are you sorry you made that decision? Now you may say, why are you asking such obvious questions? I have met men in the Army who wished they were in the Navy.

I have met people in Minnesota who wished they were in Florida. I have met people who were married and wished they were single. I have met people who were single and wished they were married.

I have never yet met a person who was truly converted and was sorry.

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