

“Let’s Make a Deal”

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March 23, 2008

John 12:46-48

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A Government official tragically dies and soon arrives in heaven. "Welcome to heaven," says St. Peter. "Before you settle in we'll have you spend one day in hell and one in heaven. Then you can choose where to spend eternity." And with that, St. Peter escorts him to the elevator and he goes down to hell. The doors open and he finds himself in the middle of a golf course. In the distance is a clubhouse and standing in front of it are all his friends and other politicians who had worked with him. They run to greet him, shake his hand, and reminisce about the good times they had while getting rich at the expense of the people. They play a friendly game of golf and then dine on lobster, caviar and champagne. Also present is the devil, who really is a very friendly guy. They're having such a good time that before he realizes it, it's time to go. Everyone gives him a hearty farewell and waves while the elevator rises. The elevator goes up to heaven where St Peter is waiting for him. "Now it's time to visit heaven." So, 24 hours pass with the senator joining a group of contented souls moving from cloud to cloud, playing the harp and singing. They have a good time and, before he realizes it, the 24 hours have gone by and St. Peter returns.

"Well then, you've spent a day in hell and another in heaven. Now choose your eternity." The politician reflects for a minute, then answers: "Well, I would never have said it before, I mean heaven has been delightful, but I think I would be better off in hell." So St. Peter escorts him to the elevator and he goes down to hell. But when he arrives he finds himself in the middle of a barren land covered with waste and garbage. He sees all his friends dressed in rags picking up trash as more falls from above. The devil comes over to him and puts his arm around his shoulder. "I don't understand," stammers the politician. "Yesterday when I was here there was a golf course and clubhouse, we ate lobster and caviar, we drank champagne and danced; we had a great time. Now it's just a wasteland full of garbage, and my friends look miserable. What happened?" The devil looks at him, smiles and says, "Yesterday we were campaigning..... Today you voted."

I talk with more and more people who believe that we are given the option of choosing heaven or hell. Like the old game show, “Let’s Make a Deal”, the thought is that we can choose what’s behind door number one or door number two. Even many Christians apparently believe this is true, because often times they paint a positive picture of heaven and a negative picture of hell in order to coerce someone into choosing heaven over hell. But in reality where we spend eternity is based upon another choice we make long before we die.

As the drama of the crucifixion unfolded, many people were faced with a choice; a choice they had to make concerning Jesus. The Apostles chose to abandon Jesus during His trial. The Jewish Council chose to hand Him over for crucifixion. King Herod and Pilate made a choice to give in to public pressure. The mob chose to pick Barabbas over Jesus. The Roman soldiers chose to humiliate Jesus while He hung on the cross. So much of what happened that Thursday night and Friday morning was based upon the choices people made about Jesus Christ.

In John 12:46-48 Jesus says “I have come *as* Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”¹ And what Jesus is basically saying is that it is the choice we make about Him that determines if we spend eternity in the light or in the darkness; it is our choice concerning Jesus that determines if we spend eternity in Heaven or Hell.

If you listened closely, Jesus made a choice of His own so that He could bring you home to heaven, which leaves us with a choice of our own. And I’m not going to contrast the beauty of heaven with the misery of hell in hopes that you choose heaven. No, I’ll point you to the man Jesus. It is what you choose to do with His death that determines where you spend eternity. You’ve seen and heard the truth today. What do you choose?

¹*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Jn 12:46-48). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.