

AHKHAREET

Edwin Thomas was a master of the stage. During the later half of the 1800's in America there were few actors more successful than he was. At age 15 he starred in his first play, Richard III. He quickly established himself as a premier Shakespearean actor. In New York he performed Hamlet for one hundred consecutive nights. Edwin had a brother who was also an actor. John was never as successful as his brother. In 1863 John and Edwin united their talents to perform Julius Caesar. John played the part of Brutus, the assassin. This was foreshadowing things to come. You see 2 years later John, who played the assassin in Julius Caesar took on the role of assassin in another theatre. On a crisp night in 1865 John walked into Ford's Theatre in Washington and fired a bullet into the head of Abraham Lincoln. Oh, I forgot to mention their last names - Edwin Thomas Booth and John Wilkes Booth.

But the story does not end here. Edwin Thomas Booth was never the same after that night. Shame from his brother's crime drove him into early retirement. He might have never returned to the stage had it not been for a twist of fate at a New Jersey train station. While he was waiting for his train Edwin noticed a young, well-dressed man who, pressed by the crowd, lost his footing on the platform and fell on to the track in front of the approaching train. Without hesitation Edwin jumped forward and pulled the young man to safety. After a deep sigh of relief the rescued man recognized the famous actor Edwin Booth. Edwin had no idea of who it was he had rescued. It wasn't until weeks later when he received a letter which he would carry with him for the rest of his life. The letter was from General Ulysses S. Grant. The letter thanked Edwin Booth for saving the life of Robert Todd Lincoln, the son of Abraham Lincoln. How ironic that one son would choose to kill the president while the other to save the president's son. Edwin and John Booth – same parents, same upbringing, same profession, yet one chose death and the other life.

Isn't it amazing how often in life 2 very similar people can make such different choices. Abel and Cain were both sons of Adam. Abel chose God and Cain chose murder. Abraham and Lot were family and both pilgrims in Canaan. Abraham chooses God but Lot chose Sodom. David and Saul were both kings of Israel. David chose God but Saul chooses power. Peter and Judas were both followers of Jesus and both denied their Lord. Peter chose life and Judas chose death. On every page of the Bible there is a truth that is revealed – that God gives each one of us the right to choose. So how do we make right choices in life?

In Hebrew and the other Semitic languages many words which indicate direction or orientation are derived from parts of the body. For example, in Hebrew the word for first or beginning comes from the Hebrew word for head, since on the human body the head comes first. In English this is like saying that someone is at the "head of the class" – it means they are in first place. In Hebrew when you are standing next to a person you are literally "at the hand" of the person. If I am standing in front of him than I am "to the face" of the person.

The Hebrew word for back is the word AH-KHA-REET. In Hebrew this literally means "that which comes after, final consequence, ending".

From your vantage point you cannot see my back. If I had a huge hole in the back of my pants everything would look fine to you until I passed by you and you saw my... AHKHAREET. Then, when you get over the shock, your perception of my appearance would be radically altered. What looked fine from the front a moment before would latter seem embarrassing in light of the back.

Likewise it is important in life to make decisions in light of the end. From our ordinary human vantage point we cannot see that which is to come. However, God sees the whole picture. He knows the beginning and the end. To live the Christian life is to have God's perspective. We need to live our lives and make choices each day in view of the consequences of our decisions or AHKHAREET.

The word AHKHAREET occurs 65 times in the Old Testament - 13 times (or 20%) it occurs in the book of Proverbs. In fact the whole purpose of the book of Proverbs is summed up in the words of Proverbs 19:20 – "Listen to advice and accept instruction, and IN THE END you will be wise". In other words live your life today in light of your end or AHKHAREET.

Prov 7:6 At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice. 7 I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. 8 He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house ... 21 With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. 22 All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose 23 till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.

1. Seeing the AHKHAREET

As Solomon looked out his window unnoticed he saw a young man walking down the street who was approached by a woman who lured him into her house. He saw what was happening and knew what would happen in the end. He knew the AHKHAREET.

I remember a time I was out fishing with my daughter. This huge fish came swimming towards us. It got closer and closer to the bait but then stopped. It was there just inches away for a long time, almost as if it was thinking about whether to take the bait or not. Finally it hit the bait and then BAM! It was cleaned out and on the barbeque for dinner. I knew what the fish did not. God sees our lives like this.

We as a church want to be a community of grace that seeks to love and accept people wherever they are at. I do not want to condemn anyone today but simply share with you different examples of choices which I have faced in life and which we all face.

a. Sex outside of marriage –

The devil seeks to make sin look so appealing. In this proverb the woman appears so attractive. The husband was gone and everything is ready. Like a good Jewish girl she had fellowship offerings to give and her vows were fulfilled. In today's language it would be like a boy going over to a married woman's house for 'Bible study' after church. She was lonely and I am sure the young man argued that he had "needs" to have met. So what is wrong with 2 consenting adults enjoying something that God made? The AHKHAREET. Sex outside of marriage is sin and always leads to problems.

Proverbs 5:3 For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; 4 but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword ... 11 At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent.

I heard the story of the New York Businessman in 1984 who met an attractive lady in a bar who seduced him. Later he went to her home where 2 men were waiting to kidnap him. He was held for ransom. Brutally tortured for weeks he was finally beaten to death even though the wife had agreed to pay the ransom. If only he had known what he was walking into.

If he could have seen himself being beaten and molested do you think he would be interested in that young lady? Better to swear off sex for the rest of your life than to meet such a fate as that! The problem was he didn't see his AHKHAREET.

A lot of people make bad choices when it comes to sex. My first internship during seminary was at a church in Toronto. Soon after I graduated my first full time youth pastor position was at a church in Hamilton. In 1993 Naomi and I went with OM on their ship the Doulos for 2 years. When we returned I found out that both of those churches had almost been destroyed by affairs. The pastor of one church had been sleeping with women he was counseling. The youth pastor of the other had run off with the senior pastor's wife. The end result in both cases were devastating.

Remember the story of Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam 13). Amnon wanted his half sister so badly until he took what he wanted. Then he hated her. Sex outside of marriage never satisfies. Like drinking water from the ocean, it may look good at the moment but it only increases our thirst in the long run.

Look around and it is easy to see the effects of this choice. Unwanted pregnancies, diseases and guilt. The list goes on and on. None of these are issues when sex is practiced as it was intended within marriage. All of us face this choice. Will we stay pure when it comes to sex? Remember the AHKHAREET. Sex outside of marriage never ends well. I especially want to address the young people here today. The greatest gift you can give your future spouse on your wedding day is the gift of purity, to be able to look them in the eye and be able to say that you kept yourself for them.

b. Substance abuse –

I am sure you have all seen beer commercials. Everyone is having a great time with beautiful girls everywhere. The promise of the advertising is that if you drink that beer then you will find yourself suddenly attractive and surrounded by beautiful women. What a lie!

Proverbs 23:31 Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! 32 In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.

I have seen firsthand the results of this lie. Successful doctors, prominent lawyers, athletes at the top of their game turn to alcohol to ease their stress and end up being destroyed by it. Relationships destroyed. Livers damaged. People killed in car wrecks along with innocent people. My roommate in University would often go out for a "good time". The end result was usually vomiting in his bed and making a fool of himself. A guy just a few doors down was not so lucky. He drank too much one night and passed out on his way home. He choked to death in his own vomit.

Please understand I am not saying that God will strike you dead if you have a drink or that having a glass of wine after a meal is an unforgivable sin. The issue is not the use but the abuse of alcohol. So how do you know if you are abusing alcohol? Ask yourself a few questions:

Do I want the drink because I desire the effects of the alcohol? If I have this drink will it place me under the influence and control of the alcohol? Is my drinking illegal because I am underage or about to drive? If I drink would it be a stumbling block to the people who are around me?

So where do I stand on this issue? I have personally decided I will not drink because I will not support an industry that destroys lives. I would encourage people who are in leadership not to drink because I believe, in this church and culture, it would be a stumbling block.

c. Smoking –

Along with the beer commercials some of the most alluring advertising a few years ago used to be by the cigarette companies. The commercials would show a handsome strong cowboy on his horse riding along in “Marlboro Country”. Such clean and free outdoor living! Do you know what happened to the actor who did the commercials in the 60s and 70s? The real Marlboro man died of lung cancer in a hospital. His family watched as he breathed his last breath.

Again, I am not saying that smoking is the unforgivable sin. Simply that it is a decision that many people make and later deeply regret. Smoking is an addiction. If you are struggling to quit smoking I know you understand this. People trying to quit need encouragement and not condemnation.

When I was in high school my father decided that he was going to start smoking a pipe. He went out and bought a number of expensive pipes and tobacco. I saw a TV program that said that smoking caused cancer so one day I went into my dad’s office and broke all his pipes and threw out all the tobacco. I met him at the door when he came home from work and told him what I had done. I was in BIG trouble and paid for my actions. However, he never replaced those pipes and never took up smoking again. Years later my grandfather died of lung cancer after years of smoking a pipe. My father said to me “You were right. Thank you for stopping me from making the same mistake”.

2. Living in Light of the AHKHAREET

These are just a few examples of common decision that people make. The point is that we should live our lives today in light of your end. There are many more examples I can give. Esau sold his birthright to feed his appetite. David destroyed his kingdom for the sake of lust. Samson was blinded and chained because he bought into a lie from an attractive woman. Judas sold his soul for a handful of money. The list goes on and on...

A good way to make decisions in life is to put the “End of Life” question to the decisions you make in life. If you make a choice ask “where is this path leading”? If you go down the road a few KMs you will reach the Highway 401 and see signs that say London. Those signs do not mean that you are IN London. They mean that if you get on that road you will eventually reach London. God has provided us with many road signs in His Word. He wants us to make good choices. We need to see our lives from God’s perspective. He does not want us to get lost.

Robert Frost wrote a poem “The Road Not Taken”:

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear; Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh, Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

How about you today? Are you living life in view of your AHKHAREET? Are you basing the decisions you make on an eternal perspective? God looks from above and sees everything in your life. Like Solomon he looks out at us through the lattice and knows our path based on the decisions that we make. Don't be like the ox going to the slaughter or the deer stepping into the noose or the bird darting into a snare. You have been given the ability to choose death or life. Choose carefully.