

“Choose Life”

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

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Introduction:

PPT* Most of us here this morning would probably agree that we make many decisions from the time we wake up in the morning to the time when we fall asleep at night. We decide whether we will pay attention to the alarm clock. We decide what to eat for breakfast. We decide what to wear. We decide whether we will exercise and whether we will take care of ourselves. We choose between Coke and Pepsi, regular or decaf.

Obviously, one of the best choices we have made so far today is to come together to worship God with our Christian family. And certainly in the Scriptures, we have a long history of people making choices concerning whether they would follow God as they should.

For example, near the end of Joshua’s life in **Joshua 24:14-15**, Joshua called upon God’s people to make a choice, as Joshua said, ***“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*** Thankfully, the people accepted Joshua’s challenge and followed God for at least some time into the future.

Later on, you might remember that King David got in trouble for choosing not to choose. Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar. David did nothing, and so Absalom, Tamar’s full-brother, murdered Amnon, and Absalom ultimately rebelled against King David. And so we learn that sometimes when we choose not to make a choice, that in itself is the wrong choice and is often wrong simply by default.

Over in the New Testament, Jesus also challenged people to make a very clear decision. One day, for example, a rich young ruler approached the Lord and wanted to know what he had to do to be pleasing to God. In **Mark 10:21**, Jesus responded and said, ***“One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”*** Unfortunately, the young man was saddened and turned away, because he owned much property—he just could not give it up.

There was another time in Jesus' life when many of His followers were leaving because of His teaching. And because of this, near the end of **John 6**, Jesus said to the twelve, **"You do not want to go away also, do you?" Peter then answered and said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life."** And so at that point, some people made the choice to leave and others made the choice to stay—there was a sifting that took place among the disciples.

Sometimes in the New Testament, people responded to a clear choice simply by procrastinating or putting it off. We remember Governor Felix who was challenged by Paul to make a decision. The Bible says in **Acts 24:25**, **"But as [Paul] was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.'"** We have no record of Felix ever again calling for the apostle Paul.

And so in the Scriptures we have many examples of choices being offered and choices being made, but this morning, I would like for us to turn back to **Deuteronomy 30**, because in **Deuteronomy 30** we have one of the most dramatic challenges ever given. ****PPT**** By the time we get to **Deuteronomy 30**, God's people have been led through the wilderness, and after more than 40 years of wandering, they are now assembled on the banks of the Jordan River—they are ready to cross over into the Promised Land. Because of sin, Moses is not allowed to cross over, but before Moses dies, he has some last words. At 120 years old, he is the oldest man, by far, in the nation of Israel. He is a man of experience—he has learned the hard way—and before Moses dies, he has one final challenge for the Children of Israel.

And as we look at what Moses is about to say, I think we will understand that the challenge Moses gave way back in 1405 BC is pretty much the same as the basic choice that we are called upon to make today. If you will, please look with me at **Deuteronomy 30**. Moses repeats God's Law, and then we pick up with **Deuteronomy 30:11-20**...

¹¹ "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. ¹² "It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' ¹³ "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' ¹⁴ "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it. ¹⁵ "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; ¹⁶ in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. ¹⁷ "But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. ¹⁹ "I call heaven

and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants,²⁰ by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

This morning, then, we are looking at Moses' challenge to the Israelites to "**choose life,**" and as we consider the same basic choice in our lives today, we find several benefits.

I. First of all, for example, we should choose life **PPT**** because THE CHOICE ITSELF AND ALL OF THE INFORMATION WE NEED TO MAKE IT IS SO EASILY AVAILABLE TO US.**

Often, when we tell our kids to do something, the excuses fall into one of two basic categories: 1.) I don't understand, and 2,) It's too hard. And yet we find that God takes both of those out of the way completely. In **verse 11**, Moses says, "**For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.**" In other words, it's easy to understand, and you can do it! And so when it comes to obeying God's Law, it can be done and we can understand what we need to do.

But so often, our real excuse is really that we just don't want to do it. Maybe we are too busy, or maybe we'd rather just do something else. At our house this week, my daughter asked my wife if she could remind her how to knit, and Keola was probably doing something to get ready for camp and responded by saying, "No thanks, but thank you for asking." I had a good laugh about that, because my daughter was the one asking for the favor. And I think in a slightly similar way, God asks us to do something, and many people respond by saying, "No thanks, but thank you for asking." And so it is not a matter of God's word being too hard to understand or too difficult to obey, but it is a matter of us just not wanting to do it.

Not only can God's word be understood, and not only can it be done, but we find in the next few verses that the word itself is also a lot closer to us than we might think. Here in our society, when we think of people having something with them at all times, we think about cell phones. It took us a lot of time to convince my parents that cell phones might be a good thing. Dad was always worried about being irradiated by the invisible waves—but now even our parents carry their phones with them wherever they go—and my own mom has a cooler phone than I do. But all of us keep our phones with us nearly all the time. And Moses makes the point that God's word is a lot like that, as he says in **verse 14** that, "**...the word is very near you.**" The word of God is right here—it is as close as a cell phone—as Moses says, "**...it is in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.**"

And if God's word was close to the Israelites, then it is so much more available to us today. In fact, this exact passage is applied to the New Covenant in **Romans 10:6-**

8. The apostle Paul said, ***"But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: 'DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, "WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?" (that is, to bring Christ down), or "WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).' But what does it say? 'THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART'—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching."*** And so the passage we are looking at in Deuteronomy is applied to the New Covenant in **Romans 10**, and Paul is saying that the word of God continues to be close to us, and the word of God under the New Covenant is the gospel message. As John pointed out in **John 1**, the Word of God became flesh. The Word of God actually became the good news that we are preaching.

So first of all this morning, we are able to choose life because the information we need is so incredibly close to us. God's word is easy to understand and it is a challenge that can be accomplished. It is available to us.

II. Secondly, we also notice that we should choose life **PPT**** because GOD WANTS TO BLESS US AS A RESULT OF OUR DECISION.**

In **verse 15**, the Bible says, ***"See, I have set before you today life and prosperity."***

In **verse 16**, the Lord wants them to obey, ***"...that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it."***

In **verse 19**, we find that their choice is a decision that would benefit their ***"descendants."***

In **verse 20**, we find that their decision would affect the ***"length of their days."***

But as we find from all of what Moses said, these blessings were conditional upon their obedience to the word of God. God wants us to prosper. He wants us to live. He wants our children to do well. He wants us to lengthen our days. But at least in the time of Moses, those blessings were conditional upon their obedience to the word of God.

And I should emphasize here that God's word is the standard. God is our Father, and God sets the rules. Maybe you have had the experience of sending your kid to clean his or her room, and they come back in five minutes and tell you it's done. Well, we know that it may be clean according to their standard but not necessarily our own! At our house about a year ago, we had a breakthrough in this area (and I told you about it on a Wednesday evening right after it happened). But we would tell our kids to put away the towels under the bathroom sink, and they would come back ten seconds later saying it was done. But we realized that it was not possible to put the towels away in ten seconds—and so we had to develop a plan.

We ended up posting two pictures inside the cabinet door—and so there is the bad picture ****PPT****—the way we found it after the ten-second towel put-away—and we labeled this picture “BAD.” And then there is the good picture ****PPT****—the way it needs to be done—the way it looks when mom and dad put the towels away. The wonder of digital photography!

We could compare the word of God to the good photo—the way things need to be—and if our lives match the word of God, God has promised a blessing. Sometimes we refer our children to the verse in **Ephesians 6**, where Paul tells children to obey their parents, “**...SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.**” What is the opposite of that verse? If you don’t obey, you may live “short” on the earth! And so there is a blessing for obedience—not only with our earthly parents, but also with our Father in heaven. He wants us to live full and productive lives. ****PPT****

And what is really neat in this paragraph in **Deuteronomy 30** is the motivation for all of this. Please notice in **verse 16** that the people are commanded, “**...to love the LORD your God.**” And then in **verse 20**, they were told to obey the command, “**...by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him.**”

Our obedience is motivated by our love for God. As Jesus said in the New Testament in **John 14:15**, “**If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.**” We need to realize that God has never promised life and blessings to those who continue to live in a life of sin.

First of all, then, we’ve learned that the word of God can be understood, and we’ve also learned that God has promised a blessing for those who obey.

III. Finally, we notice from Deuteronomy 30 that we should choose life **PPT**** because THE ONLY OTHER OPTION IS DEATH.**

Sometimes in our society today it seems like we have too many options. Over at our house, when we want to go out to eat, we sometimes get a little bit overwhelmed with all of the choices. Where do we go? We are living on the far southwest side of Madison, and the choices are truly endless. I remember what happened a few weeks ago on our way to the Family Bible School, we actually went to two restaurants for breakfast—the ladies in the family wanted McDonald’s and the men in the family wanted Einstein bagels. They are right there close to each other, so it was not a problem. The perfect lunch may be a Burger King Whopper and McDonald’s fries. Someday maybe I’ll go through both drive-thru’s one after the other.

Sometimes when we actually sit down somewhere, we are almost paralyzed by the menu. Sometimes I get that way at Laredo’s—the menu is too huge, and I can hardly focus on all of the options. At Laredo’s they hand you a book for a menu. But the word of God is not like that. The word of God could be compared to going to a

restaurant with only two things on the menu. The multiple choice only offers "A" or "B."

If you've ever watched one of the "Millionaire" shows, then you know that one of the lifelines is called "50/50." The computer randomly takes away two of the four options, leaving a choice between only two answers. The word of God is like that. We can choose life, but the only other option is death. And so, in a sense, God gave the Israelites the "50/50" lifeline—He made it very easy—he gave them only two choices—life or death.

Over in the New Testament, Jesus gives the same basic choices. In **Matthew 7:13-14**, Jesus said, ***"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."*** And so again, the choices are still the same—even under the New Covenant, a covenant of grace and mercy and love—the choice is life or death.

But what if we don't like those choices? What if we want to make our own way? I would suggest that failure to choose the right way is to choose the wrong way. Choosing not to follow the narrow way of life, is to choose the big huge superhighway of death. We are either on or off the narrow way. There is no middle option.

In **verse 17**, Moses clearly said, ***"But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish."*** And we know, of course, that this promise was fulfilled a little later on in the Old Testament. The people did turn away from God, and they were led into terrible captivity. But just as Moses said, if the people turned away from God, they would surely perish. And again, the same thing continues to be true even today. Rejecting God results in spiritual death.

Conclusion & Invitation:

As we get ready to go back to work, or home, or maybe camp this week, I hope we'll keep this passage from Deuteronomy in the back of our minds.

- We have been given plenty of information to make a good decision.
- God wants to bless us as a result of the choices we make.
- But we also have a guarantee that the only other option is death.

I hope that all of us here this morning can leave this building with the confidence that we have made a well-informed and right decision. The Bible tells us that we need to hear and understand the gospel message. In response to understanding, we need to believe what we understand. We then need to obey what we believe. Obedience to the gospel means that we must turn away from sin and allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. Our sins are washed away at the point of baptism, as we put our faith in the working of God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Life or death seems like an easy decision to make. It does not make sense to rebel against God. And so if you have any questions, we hope you will ask. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

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