

Children's message: on the last book of the Pentateuch.

- Today marks the 2-year anniversary of "All The Stories in the Bible."
- This is the last story from Deuteronomy. We have finished the Pentateuch (the Five Books of Moses), what Jews call the Torah (the Law); things will speed up from here.
- Basic Jewish education of Jesus' day was **beginning at age 6**, to learn to read & write and have the Torah **memorized by age 12** – the Bar Mitzvah.
- Realize that most of the book of Deuteronomy is one long speech which Moses gave to over 600,000 assembled Hebrews, he was 120 years old (30 pages of fine print – don't ever again complain about my long sermons ☺).
 - Deut. 1, These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel on the 1st day of the 11th, month of the 40th year,
 - Deut. 31, Moses finished speaking all these words. then he – again - wrote down a copy of the law and gave it to the priests to be placed in the Ark of the Covenant. Blessed Joshua, recited a 2.5 page psalm praising God, gave another 1.5 page blessing to Israel, then walked up Mt. Nebo to view the Promised Land and die.
- Moses the greatest prophet, told Israel their future national history even up until today..... **Deuteronomy 30: 4-6**

Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. The LORD your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.

(and for a day that is still to come)

Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

For today's message, I will not reduplicate Moses' sermon, but I would update the choices Moses set before the people... *See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.... Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days,* (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19-20)

Read Deuteronomy 30-11-31:3

The Apostle Paul, then picked up these words from Moses and shifted their choice from "living by the law," to coming to God by faith.....

Read Romans 10:5-11

Deuteronomy 30: 11-31:5 Choosing Life

Portions adapted from "Choices We Make", by Ajai Prakash @ SermonCentral.com

8 SIGNS THAT YOU'RE GETTING OLD

1. You're asleep, but others worry that you're dead.
2. Your back goes out more often than you do.
3. You quit trying to hold your stomach in, no matter who walks into the room.
4. Your arms are almost too short to read the newspaper.
5. You no longer think of speed limits as a challenge.
6. People call at 9:00 p.m. and ask, "Did I wake you?"
7. The end of your tie doesn't come anywhere near the top of your pants.
8. You can't remember the last time you laid on the floor to watch television.

At the age of 120, the last thing Moses urged the Israelites to do was to choose a life of loving, obeying and holding fast to God. Today, we still face the same choices.

When you sort through all the daily choices you make, how has a relationship with Jesus Christ figured into your equation? There is perhaps no greater choice facing us each day of our life than this and it is not complicated, it is not hidden and obscure. Both Moses and Paul declared that it is a choice not too hard, not too far away, in fact ... *it's in your heart to observe*

Writing in the Wall Street Journal, Missy Sullivan noted that many user agreements, warranties and disclaimers that come with products are nearly unreadable. Intentionally set in very small type, they actually discourage people from understanding them. Because of this, many people don't read all the terms of contracts before signing. A university professor of graphic communication pointed to a 32-page user agreement that came with his new smart phone, and said of the company, "*They don't want you to read it.*"

In contrast, as we have learned through all these Bible stories, God has always sought to communicate with His people in clear and compelling ways, with no attempt to confuse or deceive. God wants us to understand His plan and purpose clearly, *so that we may love, obey, and cling to Him — for He is our "life and the length of [our] days (v.20).*

Thus, let us now look into Deuteronomy 30 and check out the choices the Israelites were given ... to see whether or not, we will do the same?

We are faced with choices daily. Some may seem trifling: what to wear, how we will use our time, what to eat. Other choices are significant, having ramifications for the rest of our life: schooling and career choices, where we will live, whom we will marry. Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, knew of the importance of decisions made on a daily basis when he said; "***We are our choices.***"

Yet of all the choices with which we are faced, of all the barrage of options set before us, there is none as important as to how we, who have been created to live in fellowship with God, will respond to our Creator. There is perhaps no greater choice facing us each and every day of our life than this.

So how do we make the right choice? Moses told the people to choose obedience over excuses and disobedience to God (Dt. 11-16).

Moses said, *Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away.* (30:11). All of the great saints, whose Biblical stories have been recorded for our benefit, experienced God's mighty power and deliverance because of their faithfulness and obedience to Him. God kept **Daniel** safe in the lion's den because he chose to obey God. **Esther's** strength and courage came when she trusted in God for the salvation of her people. **Noah** and his family were saved because he had found favor in the eyes of the Lord. **Joseph** remained faithful to God even though enslaved and a prisoner in Egypt; through his faithfulness, his entire family were saved from the famine. Through **Moses**, God performed great miracles and He delivered the Israelites out of Egypt.

These are just some of the saints who wholeheartedly obeyed God and put themselves at God's disposal, willing and ready to do His will. When people like **Cain, King Saul, Samson** and even the **Israelites**, chose excuses over obedience to God; life did not end well; they lost it all.

Sadly, Moses warned the Israelites that in the future they would disobey and they did, which would end up with them being exiled from their homes, which God did. Like King David, they learned the hard way that "**To obey is better than sacrifice.**" What an incredible truth this is for our day-to-day lives.

What then is the first step of obedience? For the Hebrew people it was to live heart, mind and soul by the law. For us, The apostle Paul says it is to respond to God's call for us to come to Him in faith. One day a group of people approached Jesus asking, *'What must we do to perform the works of God?'* Jesus replied, *'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'* (John 6:28-29).

The Apostle Paul said it this way.

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.
Romans 10:9

Secondly Moses warned the people not to turn away from God towards idols (v. 17-18).

Idolatry is our universal human tendency to value something or someone in a way that hinders the love and trust we owe to God. Idolatry conflicts with our putting God alone, first in our lives, in what we love and trust (see Exodus 20:3-5; Deut. 5:7-9; Romans 1:21-23).

In idolatry, when **we value the gift above the Giver, we turn a thing into an idol**. A profound rule of business is that, *when we value things over people, we will begin to treat people like things*; this is even more true in our relationship with God.

It is easy to see how idolatry occurs given our deadly propensity for selfish, willful control and self-controlled security. The gifts themselves are easy to control, to manipulate, and to take credit for. They are easy to make, or to take as, "**mine**."

Sméagol the half-human half-beast, in Tolkien's books, *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, is the ultimate example of Idol worship. One day, while he and a friend were fishing, his friend found a golden ring. It was pretty to behold and Sméagol wanted it – saying he should have it because this was his birthday. When they got into an argument, he killed his friend to possess the ring, without realizing that thereafter the ring possessed him. It drove him from the world of light to live in darkness, it transformed him from human to half human, mindlessly driven to keep this ring as his alone. He called the ring "my precious," when in fact he lived the rest of his life and died its slave;

Here then is our human tragedy, we turn from faith in God to trust in things only to learn the hard way that we cannot provide ourselves with security and safety. On our own we lack the needed power of unselfish love. On our own, we wither in selfishness and then die. Like Sméagol we are actually possessed by what we think we possess.

The way out of idolatry is always **to love and to trust the Gift Giver**. Then we will be able to love and to appreciate all gifts appropriately, neither giving them too much power, nor failing to be thankful for them. As our Doxology teaches, we are to PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOWwe will then be free indeed and not in bondage or addiction to anything that cannot fulfill us or give us peace.

Moses called for the people to choose life and blessings over death and curses (v. 19)

This is not the choice between ice cream or cake for dessert, nor even whether to marry or not. This choice deals with the universal human choice whether or not to live a life of purpose. God is not offering us a choice between suffering and pain verses perpetual health and laughter. Indeed for some of us, for a time, even for a lengthy time, God may lead us through *the valley of the shadow of death*, but His promise is that even there, He will be with us to comfort, guide and protect until He brings us out of that valley to the House of the Lord. When God offers you a choice between life or

death, blessings or curses, He is talking about giving meaning to your life. As Martin Luther King famously quipped, *life isn't worth living until you have found something worth dying for.*

Yet, so many in failing to choose are choosing to embrace death and destruction. Moses said, "I set before you life and death." If we don't choose life, then we choose death by matter of default.

- We choose death when we dismiss God's Word as a faithful guide for our life.
- We choose death when we desire nothing more than getting what we want when we want it, regardless of what God wants for our life.
- We choose death when we give lip service to God's will, but then live like God doesn't even exist.

If the choice is so easy, if God's Word is so close, why then is there disobedience? Why do people make the wrong choice?

This is a question not only for those who do not know Christ, but for us who claim to have come to God in faith and accepted Christ as our savior, but still fail to obey. Remember, because it is a clear choice, that does not mean we'll easily obey. The choice to obey is simply a decision whether or not we will follow God's will or our own in life.

The old Indian once described all the conflicting decisions he had to make in his life as two dogs inside him constantly fighting. When asked which dog wins, he replied, "the one I feed."

God calls us to make a choice, so we must choose. William James once said: "*When you have to make a choice and don't make it, that is in itself a choice.*" There is no middle ground. Not choosing is just as wrong as choosing wrongly. **Moses wanted the Israelites to understand that the choice for life was a choice that they would have to make every moment of their lives.**

Our choice to love God is not a "one and done" kind of decision. It is a decision to keep on choosing. The call to love God, to listen to God's voice and to hold fast to God, carries us past the cross and Christ's empty tomb -- the emblems of God's saving grace for us -- right to the throne room of God, where we have been told to come boldly with the cry of "ABBA," Father.

We do not love God for a fleeting moment and move on. *Loving and obeying God* in this passage is a verb not a noun, not a description of an emotion, but an action word that defines a nature of a daily relationship with God.

The call to listen to God is not describing a moment when God speaks and we hear, but a lifetime of moments as we listen for God's voice for our lives.

The invitation to hold fast to God – to cling to God - is not an embrace in times of crisis, but a choice to hold on with everything you have - all the time – never letting go, never wanting to be separated from the presence of God.

This reminds me of the all night wrestling match Jacob had with a person whom he suspected to be an angel of the Lord. They wrestled all night, Daylight was coming and neither had prevailed over the other, even though the angel had pulled Jacob's leg out of joint. So the angel finally said, "**let me go,**" but Jacob refused to let him go without first receiving a blessing. The blessing he received was to have his name changed to "one who wrestles with God."

Moses wanted the people to understand that their choice to love God over all other things in life, was a choice that they would wrestle with every moment of their lives – but to never let go. Because the choice God made for us – sending His son to seek and save us – our choice now becomes easy.

During WW II, Winston Churchill was forced to make a painful choice. The British secret service had broken the Nazi code and informed Churchill the Germans were going to bomb Coventry. He had two alternatives: evacuate the citizens and save hundreds of lives at the expense of indicating to the Germans that the code was broken; or take no action, which would kill hundreds but keep the information flowing and possibly save many more lives. Churchill chose and followed the second course.

The choice of sacrifice was deemed necessary. Some may die, so that others can live. That is the very point of our passage here in Deuteronomy as well as in Romans. God chose the death of His one and only Son so that we could live, could be declared "**forgiven,**" based not on our own record, but on having our sins atoned for by Christ's death on the Cross. We have been credited as righteous due to Christ's perfect obedience in our behalf. This was the scene played out in the Garden of Gethsemane. Knowing God's will that He must die so that we might live, Jesus pleadingly asked if there was another way so that He might be spared His own painful death. But then He concluded with, *yet, not my will but Yours be done,* and He arose from His prayers to face His murderers.

Now the life and death choice is set before each one of us, before you. Because of Christ's death, God who is your life can empower you to choose life. God chose the death of His Son so that He might enable you to choose life. How will you respond?

Here at the end of Deuteronomy, Moses wanted Israel to know that their decision to cross the Jordan River and obey God was crucial to their successful future. They have buried the majority of the previous generation for failing to do what they should have done. They are practically standing over their parent's graves as Moses speaks his final words to this next generation.

Moses doesn't want them to make the same mistakes. What about you?
I would never want to see any of you making wrong choices ... it breaks God's heart

- CHOOSE LIFE! Moses says. Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. This requires a CONSCIOUS and DELIBERATE DAILY CHOICE to keep choosing, to keep clinging to God,
- Remember, that you have to decide for yourself. If you don't make a decision, that itself is a decision. A non-decision is a decision.
- If you do not make a decision, the world will decide for you and your end will not be good.

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 one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' Romans 10:9-11