

Choices & Consequences

Bible Reading – Deuteronomy 30 verses 11 to 20 (NLT)

'The Choice of Life or Death'

¹¹ "This command I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, and it is not beyond your reach. ¹² It is not kept in heaven, so must ask, 'Who will go up to heaven and bring it down so we can hear it and obey?' distant that you

¹³ It is not kept beyond the sea, so far away that you must ask, 'Who will cross the sea to bring it to us so we can hear it and obey?' ¹⁴ No, the message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart so that you can obey it.

¹⁵ "Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster. ¹⁶ For I command you this day to love the LORD your God and to keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. If you do this, you will live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you and the land you are about to enter and occupy.

¹⁷ "But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and if you are drawn away to serve and worship other gods, ¹⁸ then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live a long, good life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy.

¹⁹ "Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! ²⁰ You can make this choice by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the LORD, you will live long in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

SERMON

In the Bible reading today God said this:

“Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!”

Life and death, blessings and curses...

What does God mean?

Well, God is the God of love. He knows what is best for us and He knows that in order for His created children - you and me and every human being, past, present and future - to live our lives to the full, we need to live in a certain way, or else we will be unfulfilled and miserable in our lives.

The Bible is an Instruction Manual if you like, and if we don't read it, then it's a bit like having an expensive car and either not reading the instruction manual or reading it and ignoring it. If we do that it's just a matter of time before the car goes wrong.

Faced with the devil, the world and our humanness (our flesh), if we ignore our Maker's Instruction Manual (Holy Scripture) I put it to you that **we** will go wrong long before any modern car will.

AND, God is saying that with our human choices, come consequences. No-one can escape from this eternal truth. Choosing life will result in God's blessings, and through belief in Jesus Christ, the Author of life, comes eternal life.

But choosing death will bring about God's curses, death and eternal separation from God in Hell for the unrepentant, and for all unbelievers.

Just to clarify, the book of Deuteronomy is part of The Old Testament or Old Covenant and we today are living under the New Covenant of grace, and under this covenant, Jesus died in our place and became a curse for us.

We read this in Galatians 3 verse 13 where it says:

‘But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”’

But by Christ's death and resurrection that curse was taken away from **repentant believers only**, for that is to whom Paul is writing in his letter to the Galatian church.

God's eternal truth remains that if the unrepentant, and if unbelievers, choose death then curses and spiritual death or premature physical death are what they will receive.

What's more if as believers we continue in unrepentant sin then curses can come upon our lives too. This is because in Hebrews 10 verse 26 it says:

'Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins.'

So, God's Word says that Christ's sacrifice no longer applies to those who deliberately continue sinning, after they have received knowledge of the truth - this surely has to confirm that His death has NOT done away with the curses mentioned in Deuteronomy resulting from choosing death, for those who deliberately continue living in sin.

And so today I want to show from a Biblical perspective **what it means** to choose life as opposed to death.

God gives us the gift of life but we have to choose it and not choose death. Both are available. God says with life comes blessings, but with death comes curses. Hence it is so important that we choose life.

So, what does it mean, to choose life? How do we 'choose life'? (I mean, you can go into a shop and choose a specific type and colour of tea pot for example, but we can't say 'Hello life, I'm choosing you?' – or can we?).

When we study Scripture under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, then God opens our eyes to the truth of what He is talking about.

We can see throughout Scripture a number of amazing characters who chose life; and God blessed every one of them abundantly.

Let's take a look at just two of these characters and see how they behaved - what it was they did that demonstrated to God that they had chosen life and not death; - because that, I believe, will help us.

And then let's see how God blessed them, because this will help us understand what God expects of **us** in order that He can bless us too.

I am sure you will know some of the Biblical account of **Joseph** - one of the sons of the patriarch Jacob (or Israel as God re-named him). You will recall Joseph was the young man who wore a splendid coat of many colours. Joseph was his father's favoured son (because he had been born to Jacob in his old age) but his brothers despised him for it. They also disliked him intensely because such was God's favour on his life that God gave him visions and dreams which he shared with his father and his brothers - in which his brothers were bowing down to him. One day, they came up with a plan to throw him down a pit and they left him for dead. He was later rescued by some passers-by and taken back to Egypt where he was sold as a slave.

There, a man named Potiphar bought him (as a slave or servant). Potiphar was the captain of Pharaoh's guard, and after recognising that God's favour was upon Joseph and that he could be totally trusted, Potiphar put him in charge of his household. However Potiphar's wife took a fancy to Joseph and wanted to sleep with him but Joseph refused. Angry, she concocted a story accusing him of molesting her and he was thrown into jail.

But Joseph had chosen 'life' many years previously. Listen to what the Bible says about how God blessed him during his false imprisonment:

Genesis 39 v 20 to 23

'So (Potiphar) took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were held, and there he remained. But the LORD was with Joseph in the prison, and showed him his faithful love. And the LORD made Joseph a favourite with the prison warden. Before long, the warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison. The warden had no more worries, because Joseph took care of everything. The LORD was with him and caused everything he did to succeed.'

It's God who gives us favour with certain people. And did you catch the last phrase in that passage? 'God caused **everything** Joseph did to succeed'!

In fact so successful was Joseph, and so much did God bless him that Pharaoh made him ruler of Egypt after God enabled him to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams, and he also impressed Pharaoh with his wisdom and integrity.

There isn't time here today to remind you of the full story, but suffice it to say that because Joseph obeyed and trusted God through good times and bad, God was able to use him to save not only Pharaoh and all the Egyptians but also to save God's people from starvation and certain death during a seven year period of drought and famine.

Joseph's brothers were sent to Egypt by their father Jacob to beg for grain to keep them alive. On arrival, they requested an audience with Pharaoh's assistant, unaware that it was their brother Joseph. They bowed down low before him, and he gave them grain to keep them and their families alive, just as he did for all who came to him from throughout the land.

Joseph, recognised his brothers immediately and instead of mocking and hating them for having connived to kill him when he was young, he forgave them and made up with them, all part of God's plan that Joseph's ten brothers and his two son's (Ephraim and Manasseh) might become, what today we know as, the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joseph chose life, and God blessed him abundantly!

For Joseph, choosing life meant:

Choosing to do what is right when tempted to do what is wrong.

Trusting and following God in good times and bad (even when falsely imprisoned).

And forgiving his own brothers for leaving him for dead.

And Joseph wasn't alone in the Bible when it comes to choosing life.

We don't know when, but some time after the life of Joseph, there was a man called Job – and we see from the Bible that he chose life too.

He decided to honour and obey God in everything he did.

In contrast to Joseph's life, Job endured hardship of a most **extreme** nature. BUT because He remained faithful and kept on choosing life, even in deepening adversity, God not only restored his fortunes but added to them.

In chapter 1 verse 1, it doesn't say Job chose life, but it does say this:

'He was blameless—a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil.'

That is a way of saying – He chose life. He had integrity, feared God and kept away from evil.

Choosing life means different things for different people, but with one common thread. Trusting and obeying God and walking in His ways. It is a fact that we have needs in life but in the context of what I call 'stuff' that is: things we need like clothes, a home, food etc, Jesus said this:

'Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'

In other words if we want to choose life, it means following the ways of God's Kingdom. In God's Kingdom the citizens are pure, holy and righteous. If we do not work at being righteous (right before God in our ways and behaviour), then blessings (practical or spiritual) will not follow.

Now because the story of Job spans 42 chapters of the Bible, I want to summarise three things for you concerning the story of Job. These things are:

Firstly, what happened to Job when Satan attacked him.

Secondly, how Job responded.

And finally what God did for Job as a result. And the result wasn't immediate but came in God's perfect timing - and that can be a lesson to us all, when we are expecting an immediate answer to prayer, sometimes we have to wait.

Let's take a look at how wealthy God had already made this righteous, blameless man (by the way it does not say job was sinless, only Jesus was sinless).

In chapter 1 we read in verses 2 and 3:

'He had seven sons and three daughters. He owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, and 500 female donkeys. He also had many servants. He was, in fact, the richest person in that entire area.'

Quite a blessing, wouldn't you agree?

Early on in the story the devil had a wager with God that if God took away all Job's blessings, Job would curse God. God then allowed satan to test Job.

Listen to what God allowed to happen to this righteous, blameless man who chose life:

'One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting at the oldest brother's house, a messenger arrived at Job's home with this news: "Your oxen were ploughing, with the donkeys feeding beside them, ¹⁵ when the Sabeans raided us. They stole all the animals and killed all the farmhands. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: "The fire of God has fallen from heaven and burned up your sheep and all the shepherds. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, a third messenger arrived with this news: "Three bands of Chaldean raiders have stolen your camels and killed your servants. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: "Your sons and daughters were feasting in their oldest brother's home. Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the wilderness and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your children are dead. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

My goodness!

How would you respond if this happened to you, and you were a man of God, righteous and blameless? Would it knock your faith for six?

Would you start to tell people God is a figment of their imagination? I think many people might. So we see that even if we choose life, God may still test us.

Listen to Job's response:

'Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship. He said,

***"I came naked from my mother's womb,
and I will be naked when I leave.***

***The LORD gave me what I had,
and the LORD has taken it away.***

Praise the name of the LORD!"

The next verse says: ***'In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God.'***

Is my faith that strong? Is yours? Maybe like me you pray that God will never test you like that?

Well in Job's case, to make matters worse (if you like), God then allowed satan to undertake a second test whereby satan inflicted the most agonising sores and boils all over Job's body - and at the end of it even Job's wife said to him in chapter 2 verse 9 ***"Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die."***

But Job replied, "You talk like a foolish woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" So in all this, Job said nothing wrong.

I have to say I am left speechless. I don't know what you think...

The next 36 chapters of this amazing Bible story are taken up with Job lamenting before God - and his so-called 'best friends' trying to tell him that he must have done something wrong.

Do you have friends like Job, trying to fix your problems for you, when all you want and need is a big hug, some sympathy and support? I find myself trying to fix people's problems for them, don't I darling and Michele tells me off, to which I respond 'it's a man thing'!

The Jews thought if something bad happened to you it was due to sin. Despite this story which they would have known well, Jesus' own disciples held to this view. Listen to what we read in John chapter 9 verses 1 to 3.

'As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. "Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him'. And Jesus miraculously healed him there and then.

Now, coming back to Job, in the fullness of time, God rebuked Job's friends, He told Job to pray for them (another test of his faith perhaps) and then rewarded Job for not cursing God and for resolutely doing what is right before Him. Listen to how much God blessed Job as I read from the final chapter:

'When Job prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes. In fact, the LORD gave him twice as much as before. The LORD blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning. For now he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 teams of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. He also gave Job seven more sons and three more daughters. In all the land no women were as lovely as the daughters of Job.'

Job lived 140 years after that, living to see four generations of his children and grandchildren. Then he died, an old man who had lived a long, full life.'

Today, I have chosen to tell you - or more likely remind you - of part of the story of just two Biblical characters who chose life and not death.

But I could have chosen from a whole list of dozens of other Biblical characters who chose life over death – Old Testament people like Abraham, Noah, Isaac, Daniel, David, Solomon, Esther, Jeremiah.

Less well-known men like Hezekiah, Nehemiah, Nahum. New Testament folk like John the Baptist and his parents Zechariah and Elisabeth, Mary, the mother of Jesus, 11 of the disciples, Steven, Paul, Barnabas, the list is endless.

And God is such a loving, forgiving God that what I find so encouraging is that many of these people made mistakes and committed some pretty horrendous acts either before, or after choosing life, but God still used them to do His will, because they demonstrated sorrowful and repentant hearts towards Him.

Moses killed a man before God used him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Jacob stole his brother's birth-right, King David committed adultery with a beautiful woman and then had her husband - a loyal servant of his on the battlefield – killed in cold blood.

Paul persecuted the followers of Jesus before he went on to teach and preach about the fact - as revealed to him by God - that the man whose followers he was persecuting was none other than his and our Saviour, the promised Messiah, the son of Almighty God!

Paul chose to follow the very author of life.

Jesus is, if you like, the definition of life, hence Jesus could say as recorded in John chapter 14, ***"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"*** and in John chapter 8:

“I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.”

There is ‘life’ (mortal life here on this beautiful planet that God has created for us to live on) and there’s also eternal life’.

I am going to close with these thoughts:

Eternal life (Salvation) comes only through Jesus - and in John 10 verses 7 to 9 (AMP) it says:

‘So Jesus said again, “I assure you and most solemnly say to you, I am the Door for the sheep [leading to life]. All who came before Me [as false messiahs and self-appointed leaders] are thieves and robbers, but the [true] sheep did not hear them.

I am the Door; anyone who enters through Me will be saved [and will live forever], and will go in and out [freely], and find pasture (spiritual security).’

Jesus died for each of us and it is God’s longing to bless us, but our sin hinders Him from being able to do so, and each time we sin we are choosing death.

Jesus gave up His life on the Cross that we might live. He came that we might not only live but live life to the full **and** have everlasting life. In John 10 verse 10 (AMP) we read:

“The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows].

In order to receive the gift Jesus came to give us, (living life to the full and receiving eternal life with God, His Son and the Holy Spirit), we have to choose it. We have to believe and trust in Him (John 3 v 16). If we believe and trust in Him and make Him Lord of our lives, it means we want to obey Him and do what His Holy Word tells us to do, and to stop doing what He tells us not to do. We understand that obeying Him improves the quality of our life and the quality of the lives of those around us too.

God wants us to obey Him, not because He is a taskmaster who likes to beat us with a stick but because He alone knows best what’s good for us. After all He

created us! He knows that sin and evil will bring us death - spiritual death and even premature physical death.

If as Jesus says, He is 'Life' then (like Paul, the apostles and the disciples) we too have to come to the realisation that in order to choose life as God commanded us to do in today's reading from the book of Deuteronomy, we have to follow the one who is life – Jesus. If we choose to follow our own sinful or evil ways we are following not the Prince of Life but the prince of death – Satan (the devil). The devil is dead spiritually, his ultimate future is certain and is written in Scripture in chapter 20 of the book of Revelation. In verse 10 it says:

'The devil, who had deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulphur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.'

And in verse 15 we see, not only will the devil be thrown in there, it says:

'And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.'

I want to conclude with these thoughts: The act of choosing life over death is a pretty straight forward matter. You simply speak it out. "I am choosing life." But to continue to choose life by being righteous, blameless and following after Jesus, when misfortune or disaster comes your way is not so easy, and many would say it is not humanly possible at all. And I would agree. We need to be changed from thinking humanly to thinking spiritually and we have talked about that recently. We talked about asking the Holy Spirit into our lives so he can change us from the inside out.

In Deuteronomy 30 verses 6 and 8 (just a few verses before today's Bible Reading) it says this:

⁶ "The LORD your God will change your heart and the hearts of all your descendants, so that you will love him with all your heart and soul and so you may live! Then you will again obey the LORD and keep all his commands that I am giving you today."

In order to obey God - in order to choose life and be able to remain faithful to that choice - we need a new heart, and God promises to give us one if we decide to make that choice and trust in Him, no matter what.

So let's ask God to give us a new heart, a pure heart, and let's ask the Holy Spirit once again to make us more like Jesus so we can follow the Author of Life whatever the future holds for us in this life

AMEN

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