A Matter of Life and Death
Scripture Text: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Introduction

Choices! We have choices to make every day. Some of these choices are important and others are not so important. We have choices about what to wear each day, where to eat for lunch, what to read, or what movie to watch. Some choices are literally a matter of life and death! In the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* there was such a choice for the main character. The story was about an adventurous archaeologist, Indiana Jones, who went on a search to find the Holy Grail — the cup that Jesus supposedly used in the Last Supper. The Holy Grail was rumored to have supernatural powers so that a person could live forever. Toward the end of the movie, Indiana Jones found many cups, one of which was the Grail, and he was given the choice to select it. If he chose the correct one, he would live and could use it to heal his father who was dying. If he chose the wrong cup, he would die. It was literally a matter of life and death.

There are choices people make that are really a matter of life and death. Some have to make a decision about their health condition and the care they receive. Some have to make a decision on behalf of another person, such as a parent, a child, or a spouse. Fathers have a choice whether to support their children or to abandon them. Mothers have a choice whether to continue with an unplanned pregnancy or to end it. For some mothers, they choose to end the innocent life that is growing within them, thinking it is better for them and for the unborn child. But is ending an innocent human life ever good? Is it ever the right decision? The third Sunday in January is set aside by many churches to focus on and honor the sanctity of human life. Many Christians celebrate human life as something to be cherished and protected. This includes all life, both new and old. All life is a gift from God that is precious and ought to be loved and protected. Beyond the issue of abortion and euthanasia, I would like for us to consider those “spiritual” choices we make that affect our lives and may also be life or death decisions.

The Promised Land and a Choice

At the time of this passage, the Israelites were about to enter the land God had promised them. They had experienced many ups and downs and were now about to claim the promise God made to their ancestors hundreds of years prior. Before sending them into the land to conquer it, God reminded the Israelites of the covenant He had made with them. God had chosen the Israelites out of all the nations in the world for them to be His people and through whom the Savior of the world would come. God had liberated them from slavery in Egypt and had led them for forty years through the wilderness. He had also personally given His Law to them and instructed them on ways to live and to worship Him. The Israelites were now about to embark upon a mission to claim the Promised Land, a good land flowing with milk and honey. Just over the ridge, around the corner, was a whole new existence for the Israelites. There was a new land, a new life, a new opportunity! But, all of this came with a choice. To claim this promise, the Israelites had to make a choice that meant life or death. What would they choose?
A Choice of Life and Death

There are two cultures that exist in the world today. There is a culture of death and a culture of life. There is a culture where people value human life and seek to protect it. There is another culture where people devalue human life and seek to destroy it. It is not typically put in those terms, in fact those in favor of devaluing human life would tell you that they really want to increase the value of life by making the quality of living better. The problem is that the quality of life for the person who is killed or abandoned is not so good. We tell ourselves lies all the time trying to convince ourselves that our choices are really good when in the end they lead to death. We ought to remember, God’s Word is the final authority on what is right and wrong and how we should live. If our society says something that disagrees with Scripture, then society is wrong. If our laws are contrary to Scripture, then our laws are wrong. If someone tells you something that is contrary to Scripture, that person is wrong. Do not be deceived. God told the Israelites what was right and gave them a choice that was an issue of life and death.

**Deuteronomy 30:15–18**  
15 “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.  
16 If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.  
17 But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them,  
18 I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.

To say that something is a matter of life or death is probably enough to get anyone’s attention. We need to pay attention! There are two ways. There are two choices. We can obey God and follow Him and live, or we can turn away from God and perish. The Israelites had this choice. They were about to enter a land where the inhabitants worshipped false gods. The temptation to go after those gods and the culture of the land was great. If the Israelites chose to turn away from God and serve those false gods, they would surely perish. The text actually says if they were “drawn away to worship other gods and serve them”. God warned His people that they would face things that would be a snare to them. The other nations in the land would tempt them to not believe the truth of God’s Word and rather believe a lie. The other nations would try to replace the one true God and the truth of His Word with false gods and lies from Satan.

That is a choice we have today. Will we serve God? Will we believe His Word? Will we follow His Son? What idols in your life have replaced God? Is it money? Is it a job? Is it fame or power? What is so important to you that it is drawing you away from God and leading you to miss out on living an abundant life? God desires to give life. He wants you to live. The enemy, Satan, only wants to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10) That’s what Satan does. He deceives us into believing a lie. He did it in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve and he does it today to you and me. Satan draws us away from God, but the choice is ours. We can choose life by trusting God and serving Him, or we
can choose death by not trusting and serving Him. To choose something contrary to God and what He has told us is the same as choosing death. What will you choose?

**Love Leads to Life**

The early Christians had something to say about life. The *Didache*, an early Christian writing, mentions something called the two ways: the Way of Life and the Way of Death. Interestingly, the Way of Life begins with our love for God and our love for each other. That ought to sound familiar as it is right out of Scripture. These are called the Greatest Commandments. When a lawyer asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was, Jesus told him to love God and to love each other. (Matthew 22:36-40) When Jesus said this, He was actually quoting something Moses wrote earlier in Deuteronomy:

*Deuteronomy 6:5–6*  
5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

We have all heard that love is important. We have all heard how we ought to love God and love one another. We probably all remember the commandment Jesus gave to His disciples — to love one another as He had loved them. (John 15:12) No doubt, we all think love is important and we say we ought to love each other; but, have you considered how love leads to life? Maybe another way to say that is, loving is living. The Greatest Commandment explains the way of life, that loving God first with our whole being is to really live. We see the connection between loving God, following God, and choosing life here in this passage. According to this passage, for us to choose life means we follow God and what He has told us to do. To follow God faithfully comes from loving Him with all our being — all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. From this the blessings of God flow to us for an abundant life. To choose life means to love God.

Maybe you struggle doing the right thing. There are days when I do not do what I ought to do. Every time I choose sin I choose to not love God. Every day is full of choices to love God or to serve myself, and I oftentimes choose poorly. Love motivates us to do the right things. A husband who loves his wife will want to do what brings her happiness. A parent who loves his or her child will want to do what is in the best interest of that child (even if sometimes it is painful). A child of God who loves God will want to do what pleases God rather than what he or she wants. I pray that I will love my wife more every day, but that must begin with my love for God. If my love for Him is not where it should be, how could I possibly love my wife and anyone else as I should? Therefore, my prayer is that God will help me to love Him more every day, and from that I will want to follow Him and to love others as I should. Recognize your own lack of love for God and pray for a change of heart.

**Hold Fast to Jesus Christ**

To say that we must love God and follow His commandments in order to live may sound a bit hard to do. However, we are told in the preceding verses of this passage (vss.
11-14), that this commandment “is not too hard for you”. This is something the Apostle Paul quoted in the tenth chapter of Romans. Maybe you are thinking that this all sounds good, but how in the world do we accomplish it? How do we love God and live? Look at the following verses:

**Deuteronomy 30:19-20** 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20 loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

To choose life is to love God and to obey His Word, but this passage tells us something else about the key to living. To choose life also means to “hold fast” to God. The words “hold fast” are the same words that God used in Genesis chapter two when talking about marriage. God said that a man should leave his parents and “cleave” or “cling” to his wife. That means husband and wife will be stuck to one another in such a way that they are one person. If a married couple loves one another, they will cling to each other and be committed to each other. If they do that, their marriage will prosper. The same is true for our relationship with God. God is telling us to cling to Him for life. He is like the life preserver that is tossed to you when you are drifting alone at sea. If you want to live, you will hold on to it for dear life. God told the Israelites that if they wanted to live, they needed hold on to Him. If they left Him and pursued other “gods” they would surely perish. If you want to live, you will cling to God for dear life.

That may sound like our salvation is solely dependent upon us, but it is not. Think about marriage. If you start with following a bunch of rules, you will fail. But if you start with a promise to love your spouse and to cling to him or her, you may find the rest easier to do. If you start with a promise to love and to cherish your spouse as long as you both shall live, you will be motivated to really live with your spouse. This does not mean that there will not be ups and downs, but as long as you each remember the promise you both made, you will be motivated to live with each other. Likewise, we must start with a genuine love and relationship with God and the rest will follow. When we consider the whole Bible, this is not too hard when it is done in the power of the Holy Spirit and trusting in Jesus Christ, the only One Who has perfectly kept God’s commandments. Because the righteousness of Christ is given to us when we trust in Him for salvation, we are motivated to love and follow God. He becomes the most important Person in your life, your most treasured possession. Christ brings power to follow God faithfully.

The New Testament tells us that to choose God and live is to choose His Son Jesus Christ. It is also through Jesus Christ that we experience the fullness of life that God desires for us to have. He is our life. After her brother, Lazarus, died, Martha came to Jesus grieving the loss of her brother. Jesus had compassion on her and told her this:

Scripture quoted from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.
John 11:25–26  

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Do you believe that Jesus is the life? If so, how has that fact impacted your life? Are you really living in Christ or are you just waiting for Him to come pick you up and take you home? Are you clinging to Him, trusting in Him for life? These words are more than just a promise for life beyond the grave. Through Jesus Christ, we have an abundant life. We have the power to really live, not just walk aimlessly around waiting for another day. God wants what is best for you. He wants for you to choose Jesus and really live! He wants us to choose the Way of Life over the way of death. Will you cling to Jesus?

Conclusion

We have a choice. Either follow all of the demands of the Law, or follow the Savior Who has perfectly followed the Law. Choose the Way of Life or choose the way of death. God is the Author of life. After all, He is the Creator of all there is. God is not just the source of life, but He is life! You can choose to follow a bunch of rules or choose to live your life any way you want, and you will perish. Or, you can choose to give up all of that, and choose Jesus Christ and really live. Will you choose to live for Christ or will you choose to reject Him and go after other “gods”? Be like Indiana Jones and make the right decision. Choose the cup that gives life. Choose Christ and cling to Him.

Perhaps you have already accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. My question to you, “Is God your most treasured possession?” Are you clinging to Him? Are you putting your trust in Him each day. Marriage is not that one-time decision you made to your spouse, but it is a life lived out with one another by a promise made to each other. A relationship with God is also not just a one-time decision. Scripture refers to it as a walk. Are you walking with Christ today? Are you trusting Him today? Are you leaning on the everlasting arms of Christ?

For those of you who are trusting in Christ, you also have another choice. What do you do with Christ once you have chosen Him? What do you do with your new life? You can choose to keep the Gospel to yourself, sit on the sidelines, watching the game or waiting for your ride to Heaven. Or, you can choose to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others. You can choose to do the work God has called all of us to do. There are others who are perishing and on their way to Hell. Maybe God has placed them in your life so that you can share with them the Way of Life. Will you choose to do that? It is good news, thanks be to God. Amen!

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