

# CHOOSE LIFE

## Deuteronomy 30:15-20

### Intro

Moses knows that his days of living in this plain of existence are coming to close. The mantle of leadership has been passed to Joshua but prior to stepping away, Moses feels led to leave one impassioned address with the people who have provided him such joy and absolutely consternation. What we are about to hear constitutes the prelude to that song (no really: it's a song. It might not be as catchy as a Beatles tune...but back in the day it helped the people to remember the messages they had been taught over the decades.). Listen for the title. Here's what I mean: on a first listen, it feels like Moses is really coming down on the assembled.

And maybe he is: but the reason that his words are that strong is because he wants them to (fill in the blank!). The scripture reads this way.

### **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

15 See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. <sup>16</sup>If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup>But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup>I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup>I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup>loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

## Luke 14:25-33

### Intro

Our second passage also sounds very strident (which is a reason why I have shied away from these verses in the past).

However, as I started to let them sink in what I began to hear was a reiteration of the song title that Moses wrote (which is 'Choose Life' in case you haven't quite figured it out yet!). What I hear Jesus saying to the 'large crowds' that were following him is that the life of faith is not an easy one. That there will be times when, in order to follow the Almighty, we will have to make decisions that will, in one light, look like we are walking away from important responsibilities.

However, in order to choose life, we have to dive in all the way. The scripture reads this way.

### **Luke 14:25-33**

25 Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup>Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup>For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup>Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup>saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." <sup>31</sup>Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. <sup>33</sup>So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

### **'Choose Life'**

Small confession time: who became addicted to watching the Olympics?

I know a lot of people could care less about all of the different events that transpired down in Rio de Genaro...but I am not one of those people. I watched the opening ceremonies (and wondered, like many, how many times the announcers would say that the US athletes were 'coming up next' ...only to wait through 30 more minutes and two additional commercial breaks). I watched the closing ceremony (with the Prime Minister of Japan appearing out of sewer tube dressed up like a video game character: yup, that happened!). And I watched more than my fair share of events that I know little to nothing about in between the two.

For example: competitive canoeing. I had no idea that such a thing even existed and yet there I found myself on three separate days watching athletes from a multitude of countries paddle hard down a manmade water shoot where they were required to 'slalom' through a variety of gates all the while dealing with whitewater elements that caused me to think of the raging waters of a flooded river.

It was truly crazy stuff.

And please, don't get me started on the table tennis: as someone who played more than his fair share of ping pong back in college (to the point that I did purchase my own paddle ...and carrying case...because you can't let your paddle get damaged...yeah, I don't know what I was thinking either), the way that those players are able to hit the ball and then return it? Ridiculous!

Now, besides the fact that I was slightly addicted, I do have a reason that I bring up these odd ball examples: their dedication.

Think about it: these are not sports that are going to be paying their athletes obscene amounts of money (at least not the US). The reason that they work as hard as they do, for as long as they do is because they have recognized a skill that is within (or have had it recognized by someone else), and they are doing everything that they can to hone that skill till it is the best possible effort they can possibly put out there. They are dedicated and that dedication means that there are things that they will have to walk away from in order to walk toward the goal that is before them. From diets, to workout regiments, right on down to the people that they were encouraged to spend time with (as well as all those whom they were discouraged to spend any time with), these athletes were supremely dedicated.

And by and large, how do we respond to that sort of dedication when it shows up on the athletic field?

We applaud it!

So why is it when we hear Jesus say to all those believers, 'look, there are going to be sacrifices if you are going to follow me because if you don't, you will fail...and then people will rip on you' that we go, 'geez, that sounds harsh'?

I think at least part of the reason is because we forget what the payout is: life!

And by that, I don't (just) mean life eternal.

Instead, what I do mean is life that is really living.

See, that's the thing that has always been a part of the walk of those who are faithful: they are blessed, and blessed in ways that they couldn't imagine.

From Abraham to Joseph (of technicolor dreamcoat fame); Moses to David; Mary (the mother of Jesus) to (the apostle) Paul: they all sacrificed in a multitude of ways, ways that would cause many (dare I say most?) of us, if we were their contemporary to ask them 'what are you thinking?' None of their lives were easy...and yet would any of say that their lives were not wonderfully blessed?

Yeah, I didn't think so.

Their lives were blessed because they were dedicated, they were committed, they were faithful to the cause of the Almighty.

They chose life by being fully dedicated!

So should we.

This past Thursday I was visiting with Bill and Peggy Wilcox as Peggy was readmitted to the hospital this past Wednesday. As Peggy said, 'she doesn't feel sick...even though she knows that she is not well.', which means that we were very much able to have a wonderful conversation.

At one point, Bill asked, 'so how is the church doing?', and I paused before saying, 'it feels like we're struggling right now'.

Now that doesn't mean that there aren't positives that are happening: there are.

In the same breath, are we as dedicated as we could be, as we should be?

Are we choosing life, or do we have a few other things that we need to take care of first?

Too often, it feels like the world that we have created, the world that we adhere to, is one where we get to following God...eventually, as opposed to following God first and the other pieces of life (family, work, school, fill in the blank) find their appropriate placement.

Moses implored the people to choose life.

Jesus expounded upon that by stating that, 'Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple' (aka: sacrificial living is a part of really living!).

So how does that start for us individually? For us as a community of faith?

Prayer.

We need to offer up a prayer of confession that recognizes the beginnings of those ways that we have chosen that are not avenues of choosing life. And again, that doesn't mean that what we have chosen isn't important: it's that God longs for us to choose Him first because anything (even valuable things) can become impediments to the life, the real life that God longs for us to have.

Then we need to start to abide in God. As we abide, we will invariably do, and do so in the name of Christ. We talked about that last week. I loved being able to hear some of the simple and practical ways that we can step out in service, if for no other reason than we are able to recognize that we have been created and are loved by God.

Will there be sacrifices that come along the way?

Of course there will!

And some of those sacrifices will cause others, will cause ourselves, to see the church and how we are living in ways that seem utterly contrary to the standards of right and appropriate living that are currently established in our neck of the woods.

And that's ok, because if we are choosing life, then we are choosing the path that will be blessed.

My hunch is that there are several of you who are wondering what exactly I'm talking about. I don't think it's one particular thing.

But what I do recognize is that we, is that I, need to be dedicated to the cause of Christ in our lives and in the world. If we share that dedication then we will share in the blessings of choosing life.

We applaud those who dedicate their lives to the cause of sports that we only care about for two weeks every four years.

Shouldn't we be even more dedicated to choosing the life that the Creator of all would have us actually live?

### **After Sermon Prayer**

Holy and gracious God, we come to You recognizing that too often we have not chosen life. That instead, we have chosen the trappings of life or what is currently deemed success. Lord, forgive us. But then lead us to move beyond confession to action, action that has us dedicating our lives to You so that the crosses that You need us to carry are lifted high. Lord, lead us: lead us to be faithfully dedicated to You. Lead us to choose life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.