



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 13
September 4, 2022

Choose Life

Deuteronomy¹ 30:15-20

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. 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.”

It was a seminal moment in the life of the Children of Israel. After 400 years of bondage in Egypt, and 40 more years in the desert, they had finally come to the brink of receiving that which God had given to their ancestor Abraham as an inheritance. As they stood on the Plains of Moab, poised to enter the Promised Land, Moses had some things to say to them. He would not be going in with them as a result of the events at Meribah.² But God had instructed him to set His Law before the people once again, to review the covenant He had made with them. Having done this, he leaves them with a challenge: Remain in the covenant and retain the blessings God has given you . . . or throw it all away. To assist them in their decision, he reminds them of what their choice will mean for them, how it will impact their lives and the lives of their posterity.

These are, after all, not trivial choices, are they: life, good, blessing; death, evil, curse. How you choose between them matters a great deal. These are polar opposites – life v. death, good v. evil, blessing or curse – and the consequences of choosing between them are profound. The things is, they all go together. He who chooses good, chooses blessing and life; he who chooses evil chooses a curse and death.

Why are they so interconnected? Because that’s how God designed it. When God established the Ten Commandments, He didn’t blindly throw darts at a wall. He knew what kind of behavior would lead to a better life. So, choosing good, choosing to follow God’s design, leads a person on a path to blessing and life; choosing evil, choosing to live contrary to God’s design, leads to curses and death. You’ll never see a person who makes a practice of choosing evil become a recipient of blessing and life. Oh, there may be those for whom the consequences are delayed, but, unless a change in direction occurs, the



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logical end of our choices will be borne out. If you spend your time and energy looking for a fight, don't be surprised when you find one. Or if you go around punching people in the nose, eventually someone's going to punch back. As Jesus said, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword."³

And notice, if you will, that there are only two choices. There's good and evil, life and death, blessing and curse – but there's nothing in between. We love to create grey areas, but they don't really exist, do they; they're a figment of our imagination. What would you put between good and evil? Good-ish? Bad-ish? Is there really such a thing as being half dead? Maybe to human eyes and intellects, but not to God. In God's eyes, a thing is good or it's evil. In God's eyes there's either a blessing or a curse. In God's eyes we're either alive or dead. There's nothing in between.

Why? Because these are not merely empty choices; they're two ways of living based on the distinct dichotomies of truth and falsehood, reality and fantasy. Truth is real, falsehood is fake. There's no middle ground between them. Half truths are merely lies in disguise. Truth and falsehood, like good and evil, are polar opposites. There's a philosophy in the world that such things are like two sides of the same coin. Absolutely not! Truth and falsehood are sons of different fathers. The Father of truth is God. Whatever God says is true. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed to His Father for His disciples. He said, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth!"⁴ Conversely, He said of the devil, "When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."⁵

So, God is the Father of truth, and therefore, good, blessing, and life, and the devil is the father of falsehood, and therefore, evil, curse, and death. There's no blending these two ways, nor can there be any compromise between them. They come from completely different sources and have completely different destinations.

We read in the New Testament that our options are really between Christ with His salvation by grace through faith, and false religion, which turns us away from Christ and teaches us that we must save ourselves through our own good works.⁶

What does Jesus Himself say about this? "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."⁷ "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."⁸ The Apostle Peter says in Acts 4(:12): "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."⁹ And he asks Jesus in John 6(:68): "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."¹⁰

So, when Moses appeals to the people to choose life, he's really saying, choose God. "Choose life," he says, "that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him."¹¹

Sounds good, right? Makes sense? I mean, who wouldn't want to choose life over death, good over evil, blessing over curse? But here's the problem: In our natural state, being sinners by nature, we *can't* choose life, because we don't have the power within ourselves to do it. "Without the grace, help, and activity of the Holy Spirit, [human beings



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are] not capable of making [themselves] acceptable to God, of fearing God, [or] believing in God with [their] whole heart, or of [ridding themselves of the] inborn evil lusts [in their] hearts. This [can be] accomplished [only] by the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God.”¹² As Paul writes in 1 Cor. 2(:14): “Natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God.”¹³ Unbelievers *cannot* choose life. They’re *dead* – blind, dead enemies of God.

How, then, could Moses call upon the Children of Israel to choose life, to choose God? Because God had chosen them first. We see this throughout the Book of Deuteronomy. “He loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power.”¹⁴ “The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth . . . the LORD set his love on you and chose you.”¹⁵

It’s the same for us as it was for them. Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”¹⁶ And John would later write: “We love because he first loved us.”¹⁷ “In response, those who have been chosen and who already have the gift of faith from God have the ability, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to choose to keep the life that God has given them . . . by grace or to throw it away and [go back] to . . . being blind, dead enemies of God.”¹⁸

I was raised on a steady diet of being told what I had to do to be a Christian. I had to ask Jesus into my heart. I could never express negative thoughts or feelings. I was only allowed to say nice things to people, even if they were being mean to me. Basically, I had to be a good boy. If I wasn’t, my salvation was questioned. I felt compelled for a long time to go to the altar every Sunday and ask Jesus into my heart again, because I struggled with doing and saying all the right things. Beloved, if that in any way describes you, I want you to know that your salvation isn’t up to you. You didn’t die and rise again to pay for your sins. Jesus did. He is your life and length of days. Indeed, His life was cut short so that yours could be lengthened. Not only will He keep you in His care for your time in this world, He will lengthen your days beyond this world. Through faith in Him, through faith in His death and resurrection on your behalf, the Promised Land of heaven is yours. One day, you will cross that river from this world into the next, and He who is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep¹⁹, through whom we have the resurrection of the dead²⁰, He who is the very Light of heavenly glory²¹, will be waiting there to welcome you with open arms. And you will see in those outstretched hands the very marks by which He earned your place in heaven.

Moses told the Children of Israel, “Love the LORD your God, obey his voice and hold fast to him, he is your life and length of days.” I say the same to you. “Love the Lord your God, obey His voice, and hold fast to Him, for He is your life and length of days.” He has already saved you, beloved. You are His. He has chosen you. Now, choose Him, choose life, for He is your life, and He has already given you life everlasting. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen



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1. As with many of the books of the Old Testament, the Hebrew title of Deuteronomy – hadivarim (which means "the words") – comes from the opening sentence of the book: "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness . . ." The name "Deuteronomy" comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) – deuterō (second) + nomion (law) – referring to Moses' second reading of the Ten Commandments to the people, which appears in chapter five of the book. Following this is a series of additional laws, some of which are ceremonial, some civil. This second reading of the Law comes forty years after the first one, during which time the Children of Israel wandered through the desert of Sinai, arriving at the Promised Land twice – the first time they refused to go in, doubting God's ability to give the land into their hands.
2. See Numbers 20:2-13 and Deuteronomy 32:48-52.
3. Matthew 26:52b
4. John 17:17
5. John 8:44c
6. This, of course, presumes that we need saving at all, which is denied by many in our day who follow the lies of Satan.
7. John 14:6
8. Mark 16:16
9. Acts 4:12
10. John 6:68
11. Deuteronomy 30:19b-20a
12. AC XVIII, "Freedom of the Will," 2-3
13. 1 Corinthians 2:14
14. Deuteronomy 4:37
15. Deuteronomy 7:6-7
16. John 15:16a
17. 1 John 4:19



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18. Harstad, Adolph. *Deuteronomy*. Concordia Publishing House, 2022, p. 792.

19. 1 Corinthians 15:20

20. 1 Corinthians 15:21

21. Revelation 21:23