

AM Deuteronomy 30:11-20 Life or Death

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Date: 24 July 2022

Preacher: Rev Robert Dale

[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the Word of God and Deuteronomy chapter 30, there we will also be looking at Romans chapter 10.

I apologize in advance if my voice occasionally seems a little feeble or if I start to cough. It's a couple of weeks now since we got over from COVID, but as some of you know, it just seems to drag on and on, doesn't it?

I know you'll be patient with me. Deuteronomy 30, and I want us to look at that choice that is presented to us in verse 19.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have said before you life and death, blessing and curse.

Therefore, choose life that you and your offspring may live. Life is full of choices, and most of them, really, are not very important.

[1 : 26] If you're able to stay after the service, you will be offered tea or coffee. It really doesn't matter which you choose.

You won't regret it for the rest of your life if you make the wrong choice, and no one will be hurt or disappointed by the choice that you make.

It's simply a matter of personal preference. There are choices that do matter. Who you marry. Where you live.

What kind of work you do. In these big choices, if you make the wrong decision, you may well regret it for the rest of your life.

But even those choices are not really a matter of life and death. And our wonderful God is able to make things turn out well for us anyway.

[2 : 28] You know the promise. All things work together for good to them that love God. There's a very big choice being made right at this moment amongst Conservative Party members affecting us all.

Effectively choosing a new Prime Minister. Big choice. Certainly matters. But life will go on, whoever they choose.

Here, however, in Deuteronomy 30, is a choice that really matters. This really is a matter of life and death.

And if Israel gets it wrong, it will be an unmitigated disaster. The background is the renewal of the covenant between God and Israel.

God has brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt. He's given them the Ten Commandments and all the other laws. He's brought them safely through the wilderness.

[3 : 56] Brought them to the very border of the Promised Land. Moses has now gathered them in the plains of Moab to remind them of all that God has done for them and to prepare them for entry into the Promised Land.

And a vital part of that is the renewal of the Covenant. Israel were already God's Covenant people. But now they're challenged to keep the Covenant when they enter the Land. It's decision time for them.

Moses has reminded them what the law of God requires of them. He's told them how God will bless them if they're faithful to him and keep his law.

And he's warned them of the disasters that will come upon them if they turn away from God and disobey his law.

[5 : 07] Now they must choose life or death. This is actually just one of many such choices in the Scriptures.

And sadly, not everyone always makes the right choice. The first of these great choices comes right at the very beginning when Adam is told, you can eat of every tree in the garden, but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you must not eat.

In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Obey God and live. Disobey God and die.

It's the same choice, isn't it? It's a very simple choice. Life or death. So what did Adam do?

He ate of the forbidden fruit and he brought death upon himself and the whole human race. There's another great moment of decision in Joshua 24 after they have entered the land.

[6 : 33] Joshua says, choose this day whom you will serve. Whether you will serve the Lord or whether you will serve the gods of the nations. But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.

And they all insist that they will serve the Lord. And throughout Joshua's lifetime they did. But very soon afterwards they turned back to other gods.

again in the days of Elijah 1 Kings 18 Elijah challenges them on Mount Carmel how long will you go limping between two different opinions?

If the Lord is God follow him. But if Baal then follow him. Elijah calls down fire from heaven and they all cry out the Lord he is God the Lord he is God.

But it doesn't take long before they're back to worshipping Baal. These are all Old Testament examples of course.

[7 : 46] But there are choices too in the New Testament. There's that choice that I spoke of to the children in the Sermon on the Mount. The parable of the two ways enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few.

That's Deuteronomy 30 all over again isn't it? Life or death your choice. Or again there's the parable of the two houses.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them shall be like a wise man built who built his house on the rock. Rains came the floods came the wind blew and the house stood.

Whereas the foolish man built his house on the sand the storms came and it fell. Rock or sand?

Your choice. How many today there are building on sand? Well Paul also sets before us a choice in Romans 10.

[9 : 13] He actually quotes there from Deuteronomy 30 those words about the word being near you in your mouth and in your heart and he applies it to the great choice of the gospel.

Admittedly it's not presented as a choice. In Romans 10 Paul only sets before us the positive side. If you confess with the mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

but the negative is implied if you don't believe you will be lost. Eternal life or eternal death which is it to be?

Well I want us to look this morning at Israel's choice in Deuteronomy 30 and then at our choice in Romans 10 and my prayer is that everyone here and any who may be listening to this online later will make the right choice.

First then Israel's choice in Deuteronomy 30 Moses introduces it by saying that it is plain and simple verses 11 to 14 this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you neither is it far off it's not in heaven so that someone has to bring it down to you it's not across the sea so that someone has to go and bring it to you it's very near you in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it in other words God has revealed his way plainly to them there is a famous verse at the end of the previous chapter chapter 29 the secret things belong to the Lord our God but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may do all the words of this law there are hidden things that the Lord has not revealed to us but the law was not one of them

[11 : 48] God had revealed his law to Moses Moses had brought it down from the mountain and he had revealed it to the people now they must choose whether or not they would obey on the one hand there is the way of life life and good he calls it in verse 15 this was the way of obedience of course but it was more than that it was the way of love and loyalty towards God that is the real point it was faithfulness to God that he was seeking if you obey the commandments that I command you today in loving the Lord your God by walking in his ways and keeping his commandments then you shall live and multiply and the

Lord will bless you in the land you see even in the Old Testament obedience was rooted in love remember how Moses introduced the law in Deuteronomy 6 and verse 4 with the great Shema hear

O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one you shall obey the Lord no you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might and because you love him you will obey him remember how the ten commandments began I am the Lord your God and I command you to do this no I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt it wasn't just a case of blind obedience they were to obey out of gratitude and God would bless them if they did on the other hand there is the way of death death and evil he calls it in verse 15 this is the way of disobedience of course but again it's more than disobedience it is unfaithfulness to God if your heart turns away verse 17 and you will not hear but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them you shall surely perish it's a very solemn choice a very important choice and Moses calls heaven and earth to witness in verse 19 that he has set this choice before them he has done his duty as it were

God has given him words to speak and he has spoken them he has set before them life and death blessing and cursing therefore choose life he says oh how Moses longs for Israel to obey he could say as Paul says later my heart's desire and prayer for them is that they may be saved he'd led them these past 40 years through many dangers toils and snares and he didn't want them to go wrong now he'd lived all his life for that great covenant promise to Abraham that they would dwell in the land he desperately wants Israel to make the right choice and he expects them to choose now it's not a case of well here are the options go home and think about it and come back and we'll have a vote tomorrow there isn't going to be a pro-life candidate and a pro-death candidate debating the issues it's just a heartfelt cry choose life it ought to be an obvious choice and it was obvious no one surely is going to choose death but Moses knows what these people are like they'll say yes and they'll mean yes but when the urgency of the moment has passed they will turn away as we all do all we like sheep have gone astray we've turned everyone to his own way

Moses wants them to choose God's way and keep to it this then is Israel's choice and it is still relevant to us today because God's way is still the best way God's law is still true as explained and expanded by Christ yes but the law of God is still a revelation of his character and his will we can still sing in Psalm 19 the law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul and it's still true that in keeping them there is great reward even in the micro decisions of life it's always best to choose God's way and not our own obedience still brings blessing today and disobedience still brings disaster but today there is an even bigger choice let's look now at the great choice of the gospel in Romans chapter 10 the context in Romans 10 is actually the salvation of Israel as a Jew himself Paul wants Israel to be saved but he knows from experience that they will never be saved by the law anyone who's tried to keep the law as Paul had knows how completely we fail we're sinful creatures and no matter how hard we try we find ourselves breaking God's law we need two things forgiveness of sins and the spiritual power to obey and both of these are found in Christ and in Christ alone Jesus himself said

[19:12] I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me choosing life therefore means choosing Christ eternal life is found only in him outside of Christ there is nothing but death this is the great theme of Romans having set before us in chapters 1 to 3 our lost condition both Jews and Gentiles Paul shows us how by faith in Christ both Jews and Gentiles can be accounted righteous in the sight of God having been cleansed by his blood and covered in his righteousness he goes on to show us in the subsequent chapters how our lives are changed by

Christ so that we can and must live godly lives trusting in Christ as the saviour who died for our sins and rose again this is the way of salvation and it is the only way good though the law is it cannot save us as Paul says in verse 4 Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes he alone can save us this is the promise also of the New Covenant Jeremiah Jeremiah 31 I will write my laws on their hearts and their sins I will remember no more how does he do that through Christ the mediator of the new covenant and that new covenant incidentally is hinted at in Deuteronomy 30 if you look back to verse 6 you'll find it says there the Lord your God will circumcise your heart even there looking forward to better things to come this is the gospel for salvation through Christ and this gospel Paul says to us has been plainly declared to us just as the law was plainly declared by Moses so the gospel has been plainly declared by Christ and his apostles and he quotes Deuteronomy to that effect applying it to the gospel the righteousness based on faith says do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven that is to bring Christ down or who will descend into the abyss that is to bring Christ up from the dead but what does it say the word is near you in your mouth and in your heart that is the word of faith that we proclaim because if

you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved

Christ has actually come down from heaven he has actually risen from the dead to save us God it's not it's not difficult it's not obscure it's perfectly clear that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ there is notice an inward and an outward part to it inwardly with the heart one believes and is justified outwardly with the mouth one confesses and is saved these are not two separate requirements they're two sides of the same requirement faith in the heart and faith expressed by confession of course he doesn't mean confession of sin in this context he means declaring our faith openly and why should we not be expected to declare our faith imagine a young man in love with a young woman but he refuses to say so to her or anyone else what kind of love is that

Jesus is Lord is the very simplest confession of faith that there is some think that new converts in those days may have made that confession of faith when they were baptized it's a simple confession but it is all embracing and it's a big decision to say it Romans at that time were required to say Caesar is Lord Lord but the Christian says Jesus is Lord that could get them into trouble in many countries today it can get you into trouble saying Jesus is Lord even in our own country you will know that if you declare yourself openly to be a

[24 : 55] Christian there will be some people who will criticize you and hate you for it but that is the Christian faith Jesus is Lord one day Paul says in Philippians every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord we confess him as Lord now this is the way of salvation it's the way of eternal life Jesus says God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life and that way is open to all both to Jew and to Gentile there's no distinction Paul says the same Lord is Lord of all bestowing riches on all who call on him for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved quoting from

Joel 2 it's open to everyone today to young and old to rich and poor to male and female to Englishman and Scotsman there's no distinction we've all sinned we all need salvation and there is salvation in Christ but it comes back to that crunch point that a choice has to be made will you trust in Christ as your savior or not will you go with this man will you have this man to rule over you eternal life or eternal death which is it to be it's not enough just to have the possibility of salvation in reserve just to know that

Christ is there if you need him you must actually make your choice and follow him perhaps Christ is saying to you even today follow me he won't wait forever now is the accepted time now is the day of salvation and if you are a Christian already keep on following him all the way to heaven now it may be that someone will raise a theological objection what about election surely the bible says it's God who chooses us not we who choose God doesn't Jesus himself say you have not chosen me but I have chosen you yes he does and yes the bible does teach election and a glorious doctrine it is in fact

Paul teaches it right here in Romans 9 through to 11 but there is no contradiction what is happening when we make that choice is that the spirit of God is secretly at work opening our hearts revealing the truth to us and drawing us to Christ true Christians look back with wonder and amazement at this we see the vast multitude of people making the wrong choice we know that we've made the right choice but how did that happen we look back and we're almost mystified it certainly wasn't anything in us it was of God's grace that we made that choice that there's an old hymn by Isaac Watts I've never sung it but it's often quoted why was

I made to hear his voice and enter while there's room while thousands make a wretched choice and rather starve than come may no one here make a wretched choice but by God's grace may we all choose life Amen hope for love to me