

Deuteronomy 30:19

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[0 : 00] Deuteronomy chapter 30 and verse 19. This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.

Now choose life so that you and your children may live. Over our communion season we've been thinking about the covenants.

God expresses how he's going to deal with his people by means of the covenants. He tells them in the covenants the arrangement that he has made for them and the way that he's going to act towards them.

And the covenant is expressed in terms of a promise. A promise that is backed up by a sign. An entire sign that confirms the promise.

The covenant is magnified by the shedding of blood. And that shedding of blood puts us under obligation. Under covenant obligation.

[1 : 21] These are the main things that go into making a covenant. As we've been seeing over the last few or two years. And you'll see how this passage that we're looking at this evening fits into the general way of thinking that we've been following.

Because fear about covenant people. God said to them, I am being God. And you will be my people.

And yet these people have not fulfilled covenant obligation. They haven't gone on to follow God as they have been commanded.

In the wilderness, after coming out in Egypt, they had come to the edge of the promised land. And they turned back. Their faith in God had failed.

And they proved stubborn and rebellious. And refused to go on. And for 40 years they wandered in the desert.

[2 : 33] Until most of the generations that had come out of Egypt had passed away. And eventually they arrived again by a different route at the edge of the promised land.

And Moses addresses them now. In this passage that we've read together. He speaks to these privileged people.

These privileged people that have proved stubborn and rebellious. And he sets before them clearly the message of the covenant.

The blessings associated with it. And the curse is connected with disobedience to its terms. And he says to them, I call heaven and earth to witness.

That I set before you life and death. Blessing and cursing. Now, choose life. I think that's an important thing to remember the background to this.

[3 : 39] These are privileged people. They've known covenant blessing at least to some degree. But they haven't been a bit yet. They haven't been faithful.

They haven't really entered into it themselves. And the urge is to now to enter into that covenant to the full. And know the blessing and the prosperity that is available to those that do so.

And that's what we want to look at this evening. The terms that he uses. And the arguments that he brings before them.

Because it seems to me this is appropriate to the occasion of our gathering this evening. This morning we celebrated the Lord's Supper.

And you had the opportunity of taking up the cup that reminds us of the covenant blood that was shed. And you didn't take that cup up, some of you.

[4 : 46] You had the opportunity of breaking the bread and refreshing your mind about the death of Christ. But you sat back and you didn't identify yourself with the people of God.

There's been a deliberate repudiation of you as the covenant people. If you didn't sit with these people to take that covenant sign and do all that intimacy that is characteristic of those that are in covenant with God.

And some of you that have not taken these covenant blessings nevertheless do think of yourself in some sense as covenant people.

Some of you have known the outward privileges and blessings of being brought up within the Christian faith and within the Christian church. Some of you are bartered by a covenant sign. Yet you not take the cup of salvation that speaks to you of covenant blood. nor do you delight to hear the voice of Christ speaking to you in the sacrament and saying take, eat, this is a symbol of my body.

[6 : 11] It was broken for you. You don't delight to know that comfort and assurance strength and strength that comes from meeting with the covenant Lord at the Lord's table.

And yet, you have some acquaintance with the covenant many of you and think in some sense of yourselves as knowing the covenant blessings of God.

And it seems to me particularly fitting then that that being the situation we should address you with these words that Moses put before the people in similar circumstances.

Some of them had the back of the covenant on them. All of them had known God acting on their behalf in providence. But they weren't committed.

They weren't out and out his. And he urges them to come to know God in a personal way. So they will be in the fullest possible sense of the word.

[7 : 18] The covenant people of God to know to spread it and bless you. Let's look at how he puts the methods before them. He says now choose life.

He urges upon a person to choose. he speaks of something that is very wretched to the activity of the human will.

He says make up your minds. Come to some decision in this matter. Some determination of which way you are going to go.

And that's the way that the gospel is always presented in the scriptures. it is addressed unashamedly to the human will. And man is urged to make up his mind and to act in regard to salvation.

Joshua is going to say to the people within a little time choose today whom you will serve but as for me I will serve the Lord my house.

[8 : 31] Choose he says that's the language of the scriptures choose. Elijah and his they found the people limping between two contrary outlooks.

At one time they thought that Jehovah was God. At another time they thought that Baal was God. And Elijah has to come to say to them how long are you limping between two opinions.

If Jehovah is God follow him. If Baal is God then follow him. Choose between the two. Make up your mind.

Think the matter through and come to some decision practically on the matter. Something addressed to the human will. Jesus spoke in the same terms.

He said strive to enter into the narrow door. Make every effort to enter through the door of salvation. And the way in which he speaks in jeopardy is similarly in terms of command addressed to the human will.

[9 : 50] Come to me all you who labor in heaven and I will give you rest. Or in the Old Testament God says turn turn for why will you die.

Come buy and eat without money and without price. These are gospel invitations. This is the way the gospel is presented.

A decision of the human will is what our Lord asks for us. Not the un-aided human will? Of course not. But that's the way the gospel is put before us.

Choose. Choose life. The word choose doesn't just suggest an activity of the human will. It suggests an assessment of the situation that is before them.

Think it through and meet up your mind. That's the sort of thinking that lies behind this. And that face that most of the is the dress here brings before them certain factors that would influence their opinion and that would help them to make up their minds.

[11 : 06] And that's what I would now like to look at. The factors that are different in their attention in order that they might choose life rather than choosing death.

There's three factors that I would like particularly to speak of this evening. Three arguments he uses to show how fitting it is that they should choose life.

The first thing he says to them is this you know fine what you ought to do. You know fine what you ought to do.

He doesn't say exactly these words but that's certainly what he means in verse 11. He says this now what I'm demanding you to do it's not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.

It's not okay. It's not that you have to ask who will send into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so that we obey it. Not as it beyond the sea so that you have to ask who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so that we obey it.

[12:26] No. The word is very near you. It's in your mouth and it's in your heart so that you obey it. What God wants you is there before you.

You know it fine. He says to them you don't have to go up into heaven. You don't have to go after God. You don't have to try and discern what the mind of God is and scale the heights of heaven to find out his will.

God has spoken. God made it clear. He said very plainly what he wants from you. You don't have to cross the sea.

You don't have to go to other lands seeking to see if anybody knows what's what. You don't have to go as a pilgrim to some Greek teacher into the world because not only has God spoken he's spoken to you.

It's your mission that God has chosen. It's you to whom the work of God has been committed. You know the truth.

[13:47] You are the special people that God has been pleased to speak to. You don't need to go up to heaven. You don't need to go to the end of the world.

You've got it by you. In fact, you know, it's in your heart. This is what they were told to do. To keep the word of God in their hearts. To speak about it constantly.

To talk about the things of God as they went along the way. To speak about it in the home. And these people had the word of God in their minds from their areas of peace.

They had it in their hearts from as soon as they knew anything. They knew the message of God.

And so God says to these people that have known his covenant blessings to some degree at least.

He says to them, you will find what is required of you. Now, that can be said of us too.

[14:54] We don't need today to go up into heaven. Folks, when you go to a ritual reservation, for example, they're all the same. Nobody's come from heaven to tell us.

But that's just what the Bible promises to be. Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by God's Spirit. God has spoken. God has declared his message.

And each one of you here has got that accessible to you. If you don't have a Bible at home, you can go to plenty shops in the city, and you'll find Bibles there.

Every Lord's Day in this city, you'll find a different places and more where the gospel is proclaimed clearly. The word of God is accessible to it's written form.

You can buy it. We've got the education to read it. We've got the freedom to worship and we'll still get gospel ministries where the word is proclaimed.

[16:01] to you don't know what the truth is it's not because it hasn't been given. We don't need to go to our lands to find it because the word of God is amongst us.

We don't need mysteries to come and tell us because the Bible is there and the gospel ministry is available. And you who are outside of Christ but have been brought up within the church and especially from A.C.

So within the church you know the Bible fine. It's in your mind. At your mother's knee you were taught the Lord's prayer.

From her days you were taught the 23rd Psalm. Who brought up in any evangelical church does not know from their earliest days what John 3.16 says that tell us of God's love and that urges us to believe that we shouldn't perish.

Sometimes without even thinking about it the words of the Bible come back to you. Words that you learned 30 40 50 years ago.

[17:23] They are living in your mind. They're there in your heart. You've no excuse. None ever. If you are in that sense within the covenant and even if you've just been brought up in the so-called Christian nation the word of God is accessible to you and God says to you choose life because you

know find what's involved you don't need to be instructed you've got it all at hand easily accessible to you all that you need to know for salvation.

What excuse will you have if you perish you certainly can't save I was never told or I never had a chance.

God says you know very well what you've got to do and he says more plainly and more explicitly you have gallowite to stand up you know it's just forever he says this in verse 19 in the beginning this day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death heaven and earth are witnesses that the truth has been clearly proclaimed that's what he says he's saying again heaven has spoken as soon as Adam they have sinned God came down calling Adam where are you God seeking and saving the lost God calling man and pointing to out his guilt and proclaiming the gospel

God spoke immediately out of flood and he said to Noah I will not again cast the earth as I am done I will hold back the disorder in the physical world and I will not bring my judgment to the man though he may sin fall heaven visited earth God spoke plainly God spoke to Abraham and he said I will you God the God of your descendants after you and even in the experience of these people heaven has manifestly been at work in their experience they came out to each by a miracle of grace they were kept through the desert by a remarkable activist province he has shown himself heaven has spoken heaven is a witness that the issues were clear the earth is a witness that issues were clear when he gave his promise to

Noah he gave an outward visible sign in material and external things for the human eye to see the rainbow it spoke of God's mercy it was the sign of God's covenant to Noah earth was bearing witness to God's grace the rainbow unnatural phenomenon it was showing very plainly that God was a gracious God and these people had a sign of flesh that spoke of spiritual realities sin the covenant sign in those days was circumcision and that was a mark in the flesh that was obviously into the job and it spoke of spiritual things as that cutting had been made in the flesh so sin needed to be cut from the heart as they were circumcised in the flesh so they had to be circumcised in the heart and that was a witness to them a witness of

[21 : 43] God's grace a witness to their own need it declared spiritual reality still they are without excuse heaven and earth can bear witness witness that they knew what was at stake that the issues had been presented to them without a shadow of doubt God had spoken and the external and physical objects of the body had been in agreement with that testimony that's what God says still heaven and earth will bear witness against you that you have known the issues that you are at stake and if you do not choose life the responsibility is entirely your own the Bible says very plainly that we're sinful and the world around us says very plainly that the world is school of sin that's the explanation of the suffering and the violence and we're blind indeed if you don't believe the testimony of the scriptures the

Bible from heaven and the testimony of society around us the Bible declares the power of the gospel it says that Christ died for sinners it declares very plainly that God requires to shed your blood but that he is pleased to accept the life of a substitute for us and it portrays Jesus as standing in for sinners as being wounded for us and bruised for us to devoy our sins and their consequences and it invites us and entreats us to come to Christ and to rest upon him and he tells us to leave our sin behind and to come to rest in his grace and find salvation and the lives of folks around us that have known that power add their testimony to that truth too the testimony of transformed lives of people that live next to us of folks that we've seen and known for ourselves their style of life declared to us the same thing that there was salvation we had in

Christ and that in him all things are passed away and everything becomes new heaven and earth bear witness against you that you have known the truth and not only has the Bible told us the facts it urges us in the clearest the most explicit terms as to what is required it says come come to me all you labor and I will give you rest the one that's thirsty let him come and drink turn turn to me why will you die or with the words of Paul we beseech you as ambassadors of God be reconciled to God clear explicit down to earth practical commands it's as plain as a gospel it's all there everything is down well you may say you need more than just the word you know the plain word itself isn't enough you need the spirit along with the word well that's some theology but that seems to be a misunderstanding of things because who do you think is speaking to him when the bible says come turn why will you die isn't it the voice of the spirit isn't he the author of those words and how would we consider that his voice suppress us when these words come to our ears that is the spirit

speaking and isn't it true that you who say that sort of thing have you not felt a personal work of the spirit within you from time to time have you never felt the urge to seek

God more have you never known what to do and felt an inner meaning and inclination to pray more and you have gone home and you haven't prayed you felt the inclination to come to Christ you didn't come to Christ and you have a brass leg to see we need the spirit's work you have resisted the spirit's work when it was given you have resisted the spirit's voice when he spoke to the scriptures everything has been done and you are responsible if you are not saved at the end of the day if you are lost there is one and only one adequate explanation of it it is because of your power is part it is because of your unbelief when faced with the plain teaching of the scriptures and the voice of the spirit and the air to the spirit through your conscience if you are lost you are to bleed and that is what

Moses is saying here to you have given no excuse I call heaven and earth the witness against you today the curious characters throughout your life those that have been brought up within the church you have had the issues took before you and that there are others who have not heard the gospel so frequently the white of God has been there and heaven is spoken and earth is spoken too and yet you have not believed when you make your choice this evening there that and right you have no excuse if you are lost the third thing he says here as something to be considered in making up their minds is this he says to them look at issues that are to speak how does he describe the nature of the decision the choice that is before them

[28 : 48] I have said before you life and death blessing and passes that's always the way that it is in the gospel that's the very nature of the message it speaks in two ways and these two ways are poles apart there's the narrow door and there's the broad door the narrow door that leads to the narrow way that leads to life and the broad way that leads to destruction there's no other way and these two ways are essentially poles apart there is light or there is darkness nothing else in between ultimately you are fought or you are against there is no neutrality and that's the way the Bible speaks constantly in regard to these things heaven and hell life or death blessings or curses you've got it coming out very clearly in Matthew 25 in the passage that read what is the difference read one faith in the other come you're blessed by my father he says inherit a kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of a God their reception by God their reception into blessing a blessing that has been prepared from beforehand a kingdom set apart for God's people that's one of the issues that hangs on this position and the other is the opposite instead of come the words are depart instead of you who are blessed by my father the words are you are cursed instead of a kingdom prepared for before the foundation of the world it's a place of punishment reserved for the devil and his angels contrasts the glory the splendor the blessedness of heaven and all that associated with that style of life here and now or the terrible darkness of hell where we're separated from all this good where there's loneliness and frustration and despair and unbright unselffulness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth and the company of the devil and his angels that's the sort of issue that is at stake here and that's how he speaks in this way but he's especially speaking in this way because he's speaking to covenant people and part of that passage that we've read the part that we didn't read of that passage it speaks of blessings of the covenant and it speaks of the curses of the covenantes después disab that this is presented in this precise way. You are covenant people, he says, to this degree at least, that you've seen God at work with the road of his journey. You see his hand providing for you.

Your clothes didn't wear out, your sandals lasted for 40 years. And yes, you were never shot through your water. But, that was the covenant God would be after you.

But, if you don't choose life, you, uniquely, are exposed to God's curse. If you do not enter into blessing, you are exposed to the curses of the covenant.

[33 : 58] That's the line of argument that he's following. Now that line of argument is the promise in the New Testament. But the principle is still there.

You compare them, says Jesus. You've been raised to heaven. But you've been passed down into hell. You've done such blessings.

The presence of Christ, the teaching of Christ in the synagogue, the miracles he did. But you didn't believe. But you didn't believe. Face with such grace. Face with such mercy and goodness.

So, they cast them to hell. Solomon and Deborah were wicked cities. But the judgment for them will be more bearable than the judgment for you.

It's the same principle. If you've been given much, much will be required of you. If you've heard the gospel preached countless times, you'll be more answerable for that than the heathen who never heard the word at all.

[35 : 08] If you're proud of having heard the pure gospel or your left, the judgment coming upon you will be the far greater if you have not come to know the power of that gospel.

That's the principle working in the covenant. You know so much. So, you're the known sponsor.

And if you do not know covenant blessing, you'll certainly know covenant pass.

Not expressed the same way in the New Testament, as I say. But the principle is the same. We are like Pernod. We have known lessons.

We have a history and tradition of which we are not unnaturally proud. But beware lest that pride we are doubtful. Because unless you know personally the power of the gospel and come at you in life, the pride that you have had in our past tradition will condemn you deeper in the depths of hell.

That's what Jesus, what Moses, is putting before them here. This is the issue of speak. Because so much speak given, so much will be required.

[36 : 33] It's not just in the gospel, it's heaven and hell. Light and darkness. It's that against the background of knowledge, the judgments will be the most severe.

These are the things that Moses brings to her attention. And then he says, you choose life. Then who won't?

Surely he's made a convincing case. You know fine what's to be done. You've got the Bible. You've had the Word of God. You've had the testimony of God's people.

You've seen folks converted. You've had gospel opportunities. You've felt influence at times, perhaps, in your own heart. You'll be without excuse.

And some didn't do greater if you don't choose life. That's the argument that he set before them.

You then assess your position.

[37 : 40] You didn't come to the Lord's tale. Where do you stand? And even those that did, where do you stand in this matter? Against the background of privilege and blessing.

You consider your situation. Because there's said before you tonight, life and death, blessings and curses.

But remember this, the Bible doesn't say, make up your mind and choose who you are. The Bible says, choose life.

The Bible is positive. He did not lay it before you. It says, the choice is yours. Take what you like.

The Bible says, choose life.

Yet, urge you to come here an act of the world. Whereby you lay a hold of life. Whereby you come to a Savior and grasp all of Him. whereby you lay your burden of sin upon Him and turn in repentance to Him.

[38 : 54] And take to yourself Christ as your life. That's what the Bible asks you to do. And the Bible, Heshia Evans, asked us how to do that.

There's ample teachings in the Scripture that would give us precise indications of how we must come to heaven. One of my favorite passages, which I remember blurbing as a boy in the Sunday school a few years ago, and it's stuck in my mouth since then, is Heshia 14.

You see the power of the word? It sticks with you if you're learning it young. It's in your heart. It's available to you. Heshia says this to the people.

Take words with you and return to the Lord. Save Him. Forgive us all our sins and receive us graciously.

Now, there it is in the Bible, the directions you need to choose life. It says, take with you words.

[40 : 06] Go to God now in prayer. And it tells you what to pray. Say to Him, take away all equity and receive us graciously.

Make that prayer your prayer. And by that prayer, now choose life. And then another passage, straight from the Bible.

Here's the words of the Sabbath, expressing his devotion to God and his repentance. He says this, I have considered my peace and have turned my steps to your statutes.

I will hasten and not believe to obey your commands. Make that prayer your prayer. And so, tonight, choose life.

In the Bible itself, there's prayers given to people in your situation. You use them and you come and mark me to God tonight to choose life.

[41 : 20] I don't want to put myself in the place of Moses, but I and people like me throughout the years, your parents, your minister, your elders, your friends, we say before you, life and death, blessings and blessings.

You make up your mind, you are to face your situation, and you too choose life. Thank you.