

February 12, 2023

Deuteronomy 30:19-20:

“It’s Still the Same”

- I. What’s Set Before Us. (19a)
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Deuteronomy 30:19-20

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Dalai Lama is a Buddhist monk and spiritual leader of Tibet. He once said, "The purpose of life is to be happy." One can travel in a lot of directions with that thinking, many with very, very sad consequences in the end. God put it this way: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust and to dust you shall return (Gen. 3:19)." The fact is, pursuing and maintaining great worldly happiness requires great sacrifices of which many end in great regrets.

Humans have been tearing themselves and the world apart in defiance of these words: "By the sweat of your face...till you return to the ground." "Sweat" encompasses everything from birth to death; ups and downs, some real good, some real bad, and lots of mundane times. From dust to dust.

Maybe you'll recall the words of Curtis Jones: "Life is our capital and we spend it every day. The question is, what are we getting in return?" Well, here's the ultimate answer: **Dust!** We can look at life and this world anyway we want, however . . .

IT'S STILL THE SAME

I. What's Set Before Us. (19a)

Our text is God's Word to His people, Israel, the Old Testament Church; words given to Moses that Moses was called to speak. God says, "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 (v.19)." Years ago, Lutheran commentator, Walter R. Roehrs, wrote of those words:

God made his promises and threats in the hearing of a universal audience, Heaven and earth, His whole creation, was summoned to testify that He had told His people in advance what the results of their choice would be: it was a matter of life and death...(Concordia Self Study Commentary, CPH, St Louis, 1979, p.128).

The danger here would be what too many have said, "Well, this is Old Testament. We're New Testament." That thinking drowns in the references to the Old Testament that weave their way throughout the New Testament. In Jesus' account of The Rich Man and Lazarus the rich man, burning in hell, begs Abraham, the Old Testament patriarch, to warn his five brothers still on earth so they wouldn't go to hell. Jesus said, "if they do not hear Moses and the prophets (the Old Testament), neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead (Lk. 16:31)." So, forgiveness of sin and eternal life through the coming Messiah, the Christ, were taught in the Old Testament. For the New Testament it's the promise of eternal life through the Christ who has come. This is the same and ultimate issue of both Testaments.

We recall Jesus' *Parable of the Dishonest Manager*. At the close of the parable Jesus taught, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (Lk. 16:13)." The reaction of those listening to Jesus was to ridicule Him. Jesus then made this clear and devastating observation, "God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God (v.15)." So, what is the difference between that statement from Jesus, God in the flesh, and this statement God gave to Moses; from the Old Testament: "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 (not exaltation of this world), that you and your offspring may live." You can't serve two masters. The Old Testament and New Testament compliment one another! Commentator Lenski wrote,

“God abominates all self-exaltation, especially that of hypocritical self-justification. The thing that men thus deem high, look up to, admire, boast of in themselves, glory in, is not only low but utterly abhorrent in God’s eyes.” (Lenski, The Interpretation of Luke’s Gospel, p. 838)

II. One Choice. (19b)

There is only one choice. Moses goes on to say, “...loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him...(v.20a).” Obeying His voice. Think about it. The voices of this world have never brought this fallen world one inch closer to its dreamed of Utopia. However, they have ripped into the church - ripped into the lives of children and young people. Voices - 24/7 - spewing out steady doses of half truths, bold lies and filth. And our young ones have constant and immediate access to it: internet, cell phones, television, people entrusted with the care of their minds and hearts - teaching and satiating whatever the flesh demands - ignoring and mocking all things Godly. Voices...voices of rotting, dying flesh. Soon dead and forever forgotten.

Back in the 1950's, a Lutheran pastor by the name of Richard C. Jahn wrote:

The devil never rests. He is always devising ways and means to cause us to lose our faith or to commit sin. He is a skilled student of human nature. He knows whom to entice with evil lust, whom to incite to murder, whom to surfeit with food and drink, whom to fill with envy. He rouses some to fear and others to become overbearingly self-confident. He watches our habits and appetites and never ceases in his efforts to harm us. Before we commit a sin, he makes us overbold and self-confident; afterwards he makes his victims lose all hope. When he is out to deceive us, he can transform his manner and ways to those of an angel of light. He attends all public worship, hoping to distract us and to steal away the precious word. Only too often he succeeds. (Abiding Word, Volume Three, Concordia Publishing House, 1960 edition, p. 202)

I would think most of us are very familiar with the warning: “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pt.5:8).” And this, “...for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (1 Cor. 11:14).” Seriously, what voices and worldly desires are guiding and comforting us? God warns, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6a).” And lack of knowledge comes from ignorance - mostly preferred - ignorance of the Word. Satan is after every child of God, especially those weak in the faith - in knowledge of the Word.

III. To Dwell. (20)

And so, once again, these words of our text:

“...loving the Lord your God obeying his voice (The Word!) 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 (v.20).”

We know that we’re not headed to an earthly *Promise Land*. We also understand that the earthly *promise land* of the Old Testament church foreshadowed the *Eternal Promise Land* won for God’s people, Old and New Testament. It was won through Christ’s suffering and death for sin, and His resurrection. The words God gave to Moses are **now**: “...loving the Lord, obeying his voice and holding to him, for he is your life and length of days.”

The words of Jesus are an explosion of hope and joy: "...whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life (Jn. 5:24)." We have been redeemed, purchased, from this world's only and ultimate possession, death. As Scriptures teach, "You are not your own (you don't own your self. I don't own me), for you were bought with a price (I Cor. 6:19b,20a)." We were redeemed with the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin. We belong to God, now and forever!

In a sermon from 1540, Luther said of our Lord Jesus Christ:

"He sacrifices himself on the cross, becomes a sinner and a curse...He hangs on the cross between two malefactors, being counted equal to them, and he dies a shameful death, for all the benefit of the whole human race, to redeem it from the eternal curse. Thus he is both the greatest and only sinner on earth, for he bears all the world's sin; and (he is) the only righteous and holy one, for no one can be made righteous and holy before God but through him alone.

"All who believe that their sin and the sin of the world are laid on our dear Lord, who was baptized and nailed to the cross for our sin...receive forgiveness and eternal life. Christ's baptism, cross and blood become their own." (Martin Luther, Day be Day We Magnify You, Marshall D. Johnson, Ed., Augsburg Books, Minneapolis, revised edition 2008, p. 147)

Obviously, I don't know what you see as the most important issues of life. It would seem that it really isn't all that difficult to figure out, especially if you've ever stood next to the casket or urn of a loved one. What God said through Moses was, is so very, very critical for this time: "choose life (that's eternal life), that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he (not human wisdom) is your life and length of days..."

Christ Jesus is our eternity, and that's ***always the same***; yesterday, today, and forever!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott