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Deuteronomy 30:19-20:

“Your Life and Length of Days”

- I. Apart from God.*
- II. Obeying His Voice.*
- III. Your Life and Length of Days.*

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

Dear Friends in Christ,

Here are the words that sum up life; the ones spoken to our first parents: "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)

Humans have been tearing themselves, as well as this world, apart in defiance of these words: "By the sweat of your face...till you return to the ground." You do understand that the word "sweat" encompasses everything from birth to death, don't you? Ups and downs. Some good, some real good, some bad, some real bad, and lots of mundane moments. From dust to dust.

A fellow by the name of Curtis Jones wrote, "Life is our capital and we spend it every day. The question is, what are we getting in return?" Well, one answer is this: Left to ourselves we get.....dust. This day we hear the words . . .

YOUR LIFE AND LENGTH OF DAYS

I. Apart From God.

Our text begins: "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)

Some years ago, Lutheran commentator, Walter R. Roehrs stated the following concerning this text:

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, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1979, p. 128)

Whatever we do, we don't want to conclude that this is that old, Old Testament *stuff*. After all, remember, as the New Testament teaches, what Abraham said to the man burning in hell and wanted Abraham to warn his five brothers, still on earth, so they wouldn't enter hell! This: "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets (that's Old Testament "stuff"), neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." (Lk. 16:31)

Recall with me Jesus' *Parable of the Dishonest Manager*. At the end of the Parable, Jesus speaks these words which most don't understand, or don't want to acknowledge, including a fair number who profess Christ - these words: "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) You can't.

The reaction of His first listeners to those words was this: "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him." (v. 14) And Jesus made this devastating observation: "...'God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.'" (v. 15)

It is virtually impossible to ease the reality of that statement, dear friends. "What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." Look at this world. Everything man does is to the glory of man! Everything man pursues deals with satisfying personal comfort and greed, to honor mother earth and humankind. God takes the back seat - or no seat at all! The 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)

Therefore, at the end of the day, what is the result of a man's life and length of days, his strength apart from God? It's simple. A bag of dust!

II. Obeying His Voice.

Therefore, it is of no surprise to hear Moses go on to say, "...loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him..." (vs. 20a) *Obeying His voice.* His voice! And that's hard, isn't it? The voices of this world have ripped into the church - ripped into the lives of our young people and children. 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: television, the internet, people entrusted with the care of their minds and hearts. Satiating the voyeuristic tendencies of the flesh. Ignoring and mocking all things Godly. There is no "Hooray for Hollywood!!!" Voices. The voices....of dying men.

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

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. (*The Abiding Word*, (Volume Three, St. Louis, Missouri, Concordia Publishing House, 1960 edition, p. 202)

It's a constant process that calls for the most incredible vigilance and commitment: what voices are guiding, comforting, informing and preparing us? God warns, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..." (Hosea 4:6a) And lack of knowledge comes from ignorance (which is mostly preferred) - ignorance of the Word. So, does the following fit and fill your lifestyle and your cravings for whatever; this from the Scripture: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."? (Ps. 119:105)

III. Your Life and Length of Days.

Again, these words of our text:

"...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." (v. 20)

I know: we're not headed to an earthly promised land. But you must learn and remember that the "earthly promised land" of the Old Testament foreshadowed the Heavenly Promised Land won for us through faith in Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. And these words of Moses are *now* - in every way: "...loving the Lord God obeying his voice and holding to him, for he is your life and length of days."

The words of Jesus are like a crack of lightning: "...whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life." (Jn. 5:24)

Do you understand what Jesus said regarding this world's ultimate possession? What this world offers those who put their faith and hope in it? Death! Dust! That's it!! That's all the world possesses. But those in Jesus, as He promised, have "passed from death to life."

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 the 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 by Day We Magnify You, Marshall D. Johnson, Ed., Augsburg Books, Minneapolis, revised edition 2008, p. 147)

Obviously, I don't know what rests in your hearts as the most important issue of life. It seems to me that it really isn't that hard to figure out, especially if you've ever stood next to a casket of someone you loved. What God said through Moses is **very, very Now**: "...choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days..."

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott