

Deuteronomy 30

When someone close to us is coming to the end of their life, the time that we have left with them is so very precious. The words that are spoken are used carefully, we are serious, we listen hard, because we know that these might be the last words spoken between us. We know we'll always think back to those last words. In fact, it may feel as though time slows down a little and the volume gets turned up on that last meeting.

Well here in Deuteronomy we come to some of the famous last words of Moses to the people of God. Today we are going to be looking at chapter 30 of Deuteronomy. This is where Moses' sermon comes to an end and like any good preacher, he begins to apply the word, point it directly at the people, wake them up, send them out with the take home message ringing in their ears. You stand here-says Moses- on the brink of something incredible. The promised land stretches out in front of you. You have heard the word of the LORD, it has been preached to you, now GO and live it. Go, enter the promised land, live with the LORD as He has commanded you to do. Enjoy His blessings, love Him, follow and serve Him. Do what you have heard! And as we have said, the message is especially poignant, because Moses knew that he would not be entering the land. He knew that as a result of his own disobedience to God he would die before he reached the land. And so it is as though the volume has been turned up at this point. Time has slowed down and Moses urges the people of God to "Choose life". "Choose Life", says Moses. I know I am going to die soon, but you, Choose life! Choose life!

And so as we look at this passage this morning, if we don't hear some of the passion of the message as it was first spoken. If we don't hear the pleading in Moses voice as he urges them, longs for them to choose life and not death, to choose obedience rather than disobedience, to find blessing rather than a curse, then I am afraid we will have sadly missed the main point of these verses.

So with God's help and with this in mind would you look down with me at the verse we have just read.

If I was to ask you what the key word in these verses was. I wonder what you would say?

Why don't you turn to your neighbour or a few people who you are sitting next to and just try and see which word seems to be repeated again and again.

Heart/ Soul/ Obey or obedience/ LORD/ Life or live/ Choose.

Not sure whether you are familiar with wordles. But if you past Deuteronomy 30 into a wordle (which is a tool that makes the words repeated most often the biggest) then you end up with something that looks like this...

Wordle

There you have the sermon in 5 -6 words! And I had prepared about 3000!

But I actually think that obedience is the key word here and that I want to focus on this morning. Obedience is the key. Let me try and show you that obedience is the main thing. Verse 2 When you return and obey, then the Lord will restore you. Verse 8, you will again obey, then the Lord your God will prosper you. Verse 16, when you follow my commands (that is, when you obey) then you will live. Verse 17, if you are disobedient, then you will be destroyed!

So that's the first point this morning, Obedience is key. Obedience is the main thing! It is obedience to God that leads to life! If we are going to choose life then we must choose the path of obedience.

So then, at this point you may have slight alarm bells ringing in your mind. This may sound just a little bit wrong. I thought we were saved by grace and not by what we do! But you have just said that what we do, our obedience leads to life. I just wonder Tim, whether you have slightly lost your gospel emphasis here! I thought this was supposed to be the gospel according to Deuteronomy, not a message of salvation by what we do.

Well, just hold that thought for the moment. You are quite right, it does sound a bit like that doesn't it? But I want to try and show you the Grace of God in the covenant that he set up with His people here, and I want also to try and point you to Jesus here in Deuteronomy.

So lets carry on...

Obedience is key first of all, but notice secondly that obedience seems unlikely!

Obedience seems unlikely.

Look at the beginning of chapter 30 again. What is happening here? Here Moses looks forwards. He is looking ahead. And he sees what is going to happen. In chapter 29, Moses reminds the people of the covenant, there will be blessings for obedience, there will be curses for disobedience, this is the deal, this is what was agreed on, but the people will not obey, says Moses. They will follow other gods, they will abandon the covenant and Gods anger will burn against them. They will be scattered dispersed among the nations as part of Gods judgement because they did not obey Him. God knows that his people will be disobedient! It is not surprising to Him that his people disobey and turn away to idols.

And yet, even though He knows that they will disobey, in chapter 30 he lays out in front of them HIS grace and his love to them. Chapter 30 starts with an assumption that the people will not be able to obey God. They will not have obeyed him. It says "These blessings and curses will have come upon you, you will have been scattered among the nations, BUT, and here is the grace, there is a way back. There is a way back.

And it is possible to read this and just miss what is happening here. When you take these curses to heart, when you listen to the rebuke, when you return to the LORD and obey Him with all your heart and soul... THEN, the Lord WILL restore you, He will bless you, He will make you numerous, He will prosper the work of your hands. He will delight in YOU (Yes You. You disobedient idolatrous people, he will delight himself in You) when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.

Obedience seems unlikely, in fact more than that- it just isn't going to happen! And yet how gracious is our God! He knows that this is what will happen. He knows this is how the Israelites will turn out, yet he sets out before them his grace. When they turn back, when they come back to Him, then he will restore them. Even if they have been banished so very far away, he will bring them back. He will bring them back from the most distant land under the heavens. However far away they have gone, when they turn to Him he will turn to them and bless them! How awesomely faithful is our God! And this is the grace of God in Deuteronomy.

So obedience seems unlikely. And this is how we tend to live isn't it. We live with the fact that obedience, this wholehearted, full, complete obedience to God is unlikely. We know the weakness of our own hearts. We know the disloyalty and lack of trust that there is in our hearts. We know that obedience seems unlikely, in fact we say, it just aint gonna to happen. But we also know that God is gracious and we know that it is in Gods nature and character to be gracious, to forgive and we praise God for that, because it is true! Yet we seem to adopt a pattern in our lives that goes something like this: ... we fail, we repent and confess, God forgives.... But then we fail again, but we do confess and repent again and God forgives... again. And so on, and so on. And this is the gospel, there is pardon for sin in the gospel, but, and I say this carefully, it is not all of the gospel! We tend to stop at this point. We acknowledge our weakness and frailty and we seem to think then that there is nothing more that we can do. We will always be weak and fickle and sinful, so we look at our failings and say, well that's just who I am. I am a weak human being, prone to wander and fall, and I'll always be like this.

And that is where we're wrong. These verses have a different message for us to take in this morning. Look now at verse 11. Verse 11 says something else. It says that Obedience is possible! There is pardon for sin in the gospel. But there is also power in the gospel. There is power so that we can lead lives of obedience.

And that's the third point this morning. Obedience is possible. It is not inevitable that we will fall and fail. We are not locked in to this circular pattern of repetitive failure, for obedience is possible.

Lets read verse 11-14 again.

There seems to be a contradiction doesn't there? Obedience seems unlikely according to verses 1-10. In fact God knows His people will disobey... yet here, verse 11, it is possible. It's not too difficult. Its not too distant. It is doable. These commands are accessible, they are not hidden or out of reach. God hasn't told us to do something that we can't do. He doesn't leave us jumping up to get something like a small child who wants a sweet so badly as the parent holds it up just out of reach.

Or like me trying to do A'level maths nay years ago. I couldn't do it. Calculus and stuff-it was out of my reach. Well, its not like that says God.

No, it is reachable, it is attainable, You have heard it, You can do it. "the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it".

How is it possible? How are these two things NOT contradictory?

Well look back first of all at verse 6. When I first read this verse I have to confess, I thought it would be one of those verses I could, well, not exactly gloss over, but may be not focus on very much! I wasn't sure I really understood what circumcision of the heart was and equally wasn't sure I wanted to talk about it. But, actually, this verse is central. Really, really important. So this is a strange thing isn't it- circumcision of the heart. What was circumcision for? Why did God command circumcision? Well, it was a sign, a physical sign to the Israelites that they were Gods chosen people. A covenant had been made, and they would always remember that. And so here in verse 6, God is saying something like this. I want you to know that you are different, not when you see or remember the external difference, in that you have had your foreskin removed (!), I want you to be different internally, in your heart. It is your hearts that I am going to operate on now. It is the Lord who is going to do the operation. God himself will wield the scalpel as he performs the heart surgery that is required here.

God will change our hearts... God will do the surgery that is required SO THAT, verse 6 again, SO THAT you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, AND LIVE. The way to life is through heart change that leads to obedience.

Obedience is possible because God has changed our hearts towards Him.

The gospel is a gospel of pardon, there is forgiveness with God, yet ... it is also a gospel of power. Power to change us from the inside out.

But just go back to verse 14 again and let's see something else amazing.

What is the word here? Well, we've already said it is the word of the law, the commands that the people had been given. Yet just look back with me to chapter 4 of Deuteronomy. And look at verse 7.

Deuteronomy 4.7. Page...

"What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to Him?

So the word is near to us. Chapter 30. But what or rather, who else is near us? Yahweh (the covenant Lord God) is near us- chapter 4. And then look ahead to Johns gospel chapter 1 and verse 14.

John 1.14. Page ...

Christ the LORD is near us and He is the word! "The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the father full of grace and truth. Verse 17. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Our LORD Jesus, Gods eternal word, Gods forever communication of Himself, came very near to us. He came to live in our street.

So back to Deuteronomy 30 again- We have the truth about ourselves- that we are total failures, we have the truth of Gods grace which is amazing, we have the truth of the power of the gospel, powerful to change us from the inside out, and here in verse 14 of Deuteronomy 30, we have the Word of God, who is very near us, who is in our hearts (by His Spirit- dwelling in us) who is full of grace and truth, and it is Jesus Christ. Jesus is here in Deuteronomy. By His power he transforms us and by His grace he forgives our frequent failings and through his complete and full obedience to the law, he covers our unrighteousness and our disobedience. Do you know, there is so much depth in these verses and I feel I have only just begun to understand them, but I would really encourage you to go away and ponder it for yourself. If you want to really blow your mind, do read Romans 10 with it and see how Paul uses these verses in his letter there and we may look at this in Homegroup together. (By the way, if you're not part of a homegroup- you really should join one! You are missing out big time!) Just thought I would throw that in for free!

So obedience is possible because God changes our hearts, and it is possible because we have the LORD Jesus within us and empowering us...

But then see fourthly, that obedience leads to life. Obedience leads to life.

Moses sermon here is reaching its conclusion and you can almost hear the crescendo. See, See says Moses, I have set before you life and prosperity on the one hand, death and destruction on the other. You all have a

choice to make here. WILL YOU CHOOSE LIFE? Or will you choose death? You know the way to life. You know that this is the covenant made with the living and one true God. I have set it out before you. Now what is your response?

Let me make it ever so clear, he says ... What is the way to life? It is through following the commands of God. What are the commands of God? Well, to love Him, to walk in His ways, and to keep all his commands and then you will live. Moses is hammering the point home- keep the commands and live. Disobey and face destruction!

As we have seen before in this series and as we can see in these verses again, the command is firstly to love. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul (Deuteronomy 6) . Verse 15- I command you to love. Our obedience is a loving response to Gods grace shown to us! It is not a way back into his presence. It is not the way to salvation. No, we have already been saved, by His grace, and now we love the one who saved us and we keep his commands and we walk with Him in His ways! That's what we want to do, that is where we want to be. How difficult can that be actually? If someone has blessed you beyond your comprehension, how difficult should it be to love them? And yet that is what God commands of us, simply to love Him and walk with Him!

Verse 19 almost repeats this challenge in the sermon- but this time Moses calls witnesses. This was something that the other nations did when they made covenants too, they called witnesses to the agreement being made. I expect you may have been asked to witness someone's signature on a legal document, so here Moses calls heaven and Earth to witness that he has clearly set out to them the terms of the covenant. Now choose life, so that you may live. And as you live, you will be loving the Lord. Listening to his voice and being loyal to him. That is what God asks of you. To love Him, to listen to His voice and to Hold fast, to be loyal only to Him.

Are you tempted to give up sometimes? Hold fast!

"Hold fast" there is such a strong word. It implies lifelong faithfulness. It is like the word that Genesis 1 uses when it talks about the man cleaving or staying united to his wife. Inseparable. Like those mussels that you see on the rocks at the coast, and you have to take a hammer and chisel to separate them from the rock! We must cling to God so strongly and never let go. This is the obedience that we are called to.

So my 5th point this morning is simply this: Choose life!

It seems a bit obvious doesn't it? Choose life! Well who wouldn't? Who wouldn't choose a life of love with God? Why would you go anywhere else? Why on earth would you choose death and destruction?

If you're a Christian here this morning- choose life! Choose a lifelong obedience of love. Choose to have no rival to God in your heart. Choose not to be tightfisted with your time and your money. Choose not to tolerate injustice and instead work hard for justice. Choose to live dependently and humbly, feeding on Gods words daily, being open and honest with Gods people, your church family here. Choose to lead your family rightly and towards God. Choose life! And keep on choosing life.

But if you have come this morning and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, then could I urge you too to choose life. It is urgent. It is for today. It is for now. What you decide this morning will change the course of the rest of your life.

How fragile life is. We are all just a moment away from eternity. That's the reality. I have become so much more aware of cyclists on the roads, and particularly thinking of my own son Sam cycling to and from school. Is it 15 cyclists that have died on London's roads this year so far? Isn't that tragic! That is deeply sad. Life is so fragile and at its longest it is still so short. Yet here, this morning you have the offer of life. A forever life with this God of love. With this God who longs to be gracious. And it is not a fanciful thing. Not a fairy tale. It is based on the truth of Jesus Christ. The historical facts of his death and resurrection. We have a choice this morning! Will we choose to respond to the grace of God and live this life of loving obedience to Him? Will you choose life?

A prayer to finish