

2020: The Global Year of the Bible
The Second Sunday of Lent: Deuteronomy 26-32
A Lamp and a Light, Part 10
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In our Bible reading plan this past week we (finally) completed reading through all of the commandments in the Mosaic Law. Wow! In times past reading through the Scriptures, I was aware, of course, of all the commandments, but the way that they are all listed together, in categories, in the chronological Bible many of us are using makes the list even more daunting. I think we can all agree that it is quite the comprehensive list of things to do and not to do. We have been reading these commandments since February 18th. Now the people are ready to cross the Jordan river into the Promised Land, the land described by God as flowing with milk and honey. They have been given their perimeters for how to live together in community under the watchful eye of a holy God, and now Moses gives them an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to keep the commandments and live as God's beloved people.

Let's think about the scene this way: It's March Madness time for those who follow college basketball. Think of a team who has worked hard all season. They've made it into the NCAA tournament. It's time for the biggest game of their careers. The team is in the locker room about to take the court when the coach starts getting them pumped up. "Who's in the NCAA tournament? We are!" "Who deserves to be here playing on the big stage?" "We do!" "Who's going to light up the court? We are!" "Who is going to win this game? We are!" You get the scene? This is Moses with his millions of people before they cross the Jordan. He is taking them to a moment of recommitment, a moment to reaffirm their special relationship with God before the bigger moment of stepping into the Jordan River to get to their new homeland.

Hear these words from Moses as recorded in Deuteronomy 30:15-20, ¹⁵"Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster. ¹⁶For I command you this day to love the Lord your God and to keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. If you do this, you will live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you and the land you are about to enter and occupy. ¹⁷"But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and if you are drawn away to serve and worship other gods, ¹⁸then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live a long, good life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. ¹⁹"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! ²⁰You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the Lord, you will live long in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

**Choose life by making the choice to love the Lord your God
by obeying him and committing yourself firmly to him.
This is the key to your life.**

This is the same choice we have every day. Every single day. Jesus came to fulfill the law for us. His obedience was our obedience – one for all. We don't have to be weighed down by remembering 613 commandments, Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf. He chose life for us by coming to us as a human, proving God's love and commitment to saving us just as we are – imperfect sinners in need of a perfect Savior.

Pastor David Platt in our Lenten study, *Something Needs to Change*, is exposing us to urgent physical and spiritual needs in the Himalayas. Over 9,000,000 people live in this area with only approximately 100 of them knowing Jesus. Platt shares the story of a village where 60 people died because of a cholera outbreak. There is a remedy for cholera, but the people in this village, and so many like it, don't have the remedy. He also tells about families in such desperate situations in the villages that they let their young daughters go with 'businessmen' who promise

to give these young girls jobs so they can send money back to their families. The truth is that these girls are being trafficked. They are slaves to these men who take their virginity, their identity, their dignity, their freedom, their contact with their families, and their wages. This is happening all over the world (not just in the Himalayas), including right here in our own country, our own state, and our own county.

Last week in the Lenten study we were challenged with the following four points:

1. It is dangerously possible to have religion without repentance – meaning that we can religiously come to church, listen to sermons, give a full tithe in the offering plate, go on mission trips, you name it – but never, never turn away from the ways of sin that are detestable to the Lord.
2. It is completely impossible to be a Christian without change. If we have truly given our lives to Jesus Christ, our lives are going to look different than they did before, and they should look different than the lives of those who haven't yet come to faith in him.
3. Judgment is inevitable for every person, based upon how they respond to Jesus. Jesus said He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through him. When the day of judgment comes, all people will be judged based on how whether they said yes or no to Jesus.
4. Hope is available to all people because of the good news of Jesus. No one is excluded. Jesus came for everyone. But we, as repentant, changed, saved followers of Jesus have to tell them – or make sure someone gets to where they are to tell them!

Something needs to change. It is way too easy for us to live insulated and isolated from the hard truths that people around us and across the world from us are in desperate physical & spiritual need. Even though the technology makes it possible for us to see into the lives of people in the remote villages of the Himalayas, it is still incredibly easy for us to shut down our concern or compassion because we don't know them, we're never going to know them, and somebody else will help them. In fact, David Platt and his big church in Virginia, surely they are already making the kind of difference we could never make from our little church right here. It's just so easy, and dare I say even acceptable for us to turn away from so much need and just keep doing what we're doing. After all, we're helping our family, we're helping our neighbors, we're helping our school, we're helping our communities, we're supporting 4 different missionary families in Argentina, Lithuania, Thailand, and Alaska. We're supporting Women in Need, the Franklin Co. Prison Chaplain Ministry, Pregnancy Ministries, NETwork Ministry, Sweet Grace Ministries, Operation Christmas Child, we are supporting 56 children through Compassion International all over the world, and many other individuals or organizations who reach out with financial needs. It can feel as overwhelming to us, all the needs of the world, the urgent physical & spiritual needs here, and there, and everywhere – it can feel as overwhelming to us as all those commands must have felt to the Israelites.

But they prepared to make the move anyway. They prepared to cross the Jordan River anyway. Their intentions to live by God's commands were good, earnest in fact, but even before they took the first step, they knew they would fail. In Deuteronomy 31:16-18 we read this, "*The LORD said to Moses, "You are about to die and join your ancestors. After you are gone, these people will begin to worship foreign gods, the gods of the land where they are going. They will abandon me and break my covenant that I have made with them."*" They knew they weren't going to be able to follow every single commandment, just like we know we're not going to be able to meet every need. But they moved forward anyway. We must move forward anyway.

Jesus is sort-of like our Jordan River. He is the Way to the Promised Land. He is the one who cleanses us, who refreshes us, who replenishes us. He is the way we get from being lost and wandering in the wilderness of darkness and sin to being safe at home with God. Just like the Israelites were led to the Jordan River, by God's grace we have all been led to Jesus. Through the waters of baptism we are joined to his holy worldwide movement of people whose mission is to lead more people to him in whatever way God directs. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are given abundant fruitful lives here and eternal life in heaven.

Moses said, *"Today I have given you a choice between life and death."* When it comes right down to it, we all have a choice every single day. Who or what are we going to follow? It took no time at all for many of the Israelites to start following other gods. The pressure from all the new enticements was just too much for some of them. Who or what are we going to follow each day? What are we going to choose? There are millions, billions of opportunities to follow people on youtube channels, Instagram, Tik Tok, Reddit, Facebook, Snapchat. Who are you following and what kind of impact is it having on your life? Are you following the Republicans or the Democrats? President Trump, Joe Biden, or Bernie Sanders? Are you following the cravings of your body or mind for food, alcohol, pornography, slothful living? Are you following the people at work who cuss and complain and cheat the employer with time taken but not given? Are you following the people around you at school who bully others, who say that school is a waste of time so they don't do their homework, people who speak disrespectfully to or about teachers and other leaders? Are you following a sports team so closely that when they're up, you're up, and when they're down, you're down? Are you following your out-of-control emotions? That rarely works out. Are you so tuned in to all the news about the Coronavirus that you're following the footsteps of fear? Who or what are you following?

We read earlier these words from Moses: *"Choose life by making the choice to love the Lord your God by obeying him and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life."* Choose life by making the choice to follow Jesus. Commit yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. I am trusting that as we follow Jesus, he will show us how to make a difference in the lives of people in urgent physical & spiritual need. Something Needs to Change. And today, maybe that something is your renewed determination to follow Jesus.

As the Israelites stood on the bank of the Jordan River, this river in which Jesus himself was baptized thousands of years later, they reaffirmed their covenant with God. Today, I invite you to reaffirm the covenant vows that you made, or were made on your behalf by your parents at your baptism. Vows of your faith in Jesus and your desire to follow him. So here's what we're going to do: There will be four bowls of water held by your deacons up front. I invite you to come forward, clean your finger with a wipe, dip your finger into the water, then make the sign of the cross on your forehead as you say, "I follow Jesus." (For those reading this at home, you can do this at home.). For small children who have been baptized, a parent or the person holding the bowl will help you. If you have not yet been baptized, please come to me and I will pray a blessing over you as a first step towards your baptism. Please really think about what you are doing and what you are saying. It is dangerously possible to be religious without repentance. Don't do this as a religious act. Do this as a sign of your renewed commitment to live your life as a follower of Jesus Christ. Let us prepare for this time of recommitment by praying together this prayer of confession: *Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. In your mercy, forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name.*

Friends, here's what I know. We are loved. We are forgiven and freed from anything that tries to pull us back into dark and hidden ways. We are saved by grace. God's grace. God's perfect, amazing grace. Amen.