

Title: “To Be or Not To Be”

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Deut. 30:15-20

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Service Readings: Deut. 30:15–20, Philemon 1–21, Luke 14:25–35

“To be or not to be” is a question that has been asked by every generation. What does it mean “to be?” On the cusp of entering the promised land, Israel faced this question by God, himself. Were they to live under obedience to Him? And what would that life look like?

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

To be or not to be. That is the question. But it is not as simple as Shakespeare makes it out to be. In his soliloquy Prince Hamlet contemplates whether or not to commit suicide – whether to choose life or choose death. And for him it is a choice that, at its core, is simply one of heartbeat and breath.

To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,

You see, from a worldly perspective these choices can actually be weighed. For when the value of a life is determined by the individual, or the society, that value can be measured by the individual or even the society. Just as it was measured in the time of Shakespeare it is measured in our time as well. For example, how much value does society place on a life that is yet to be born? Or, of what value is a person who lives confined to a bed at the end of her life? Maybe age is the wrong unit; what of health, or wealth, or active contribution to society? Or maybe society has matured beyond only one unit by which to measure the value of a life and instead adopts a mixture of health and wealth and age and whatever... The point is, when the value of a life is defined by man instead of God, Hamlet’s question becomes not only reasonable but potentially even expected. The decision to continue living or not becomes normalized as a decision that every person is empowered to make in his or her years on earth. “To be or not to be. That is the question.”

But it’s not. It never has been and it never will be. At least, not in the eyes of God. For when the value of a human life is defined by God instead of man, the value of a life becomes immeasurable. For how can we even begin to understand the breadth and depth of value that God places on each of us? All we can comprehend is but a shadow of that reality.

The world teaches that life begins and ends here on earth and it teaches that value begins and ends here as well. But God teaches that he valued us long before we were even formed in the womb. He teaches that life ends not with death, not when we enter into the ground, but that life is eternal and it *never* ends. And so, when Adam and Eve fell into sin and all creation was faced with eternal life apart from God, he sent Jesus into the world to save us. And there on the cross, when he turned his back on him, and he poured out his wrath on him for the sins of all mankind. And he did so

because of the value that he placed on us, each of us... Even those who currently find no value in their own lives; even those who find no value in God, himself. These too Jesus suffered for, because every life is immeasurably precious to him.

And, because every life is precious to him, he desires the very best for every life. And he tells us that best can be found only through obedience to him. For it is through this obedience that we experience a life that he created us for and a promise of an even better life when after death.

And so with this context we view the passage from Deuteronomy that was read this morning. It starts out this way:

¹⁵“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse.

For the nation of Israel, to live meant to walk in the ways of God: to be obedient to him. It meant to keep his commands, decrees, and laws. Doing this would ensure life. But if they didn't if their hearts turned from him and if they would not listen to him, death awaited. But death awaited not because of any choice or preference from God! No. He valued their lives! He wanted them to experience life – life with him! He would even send his son to *die* for their eternal lives. This passage is much more than God simply offering them two options. It was God describing to them what life, real life looked like and he was pleading with them to choose it because he knew what was best for them and he wanted what was best for them. God gave them the freedom of choice, but he did so with hope that they would choose him.

To be God's children or to not be his children. This was the *real* question before Israel that day. Were they to live under the rule of God and be alive or were they to live free from his rule and find death? For them, this was also a very worldly question as they faced entry into the promised land. For on that land lived many enemies and they knew that God's intervention would be necessary to lay claim to it. But for us, on this side of the cross, we see more in this passage than just worldly possessions and blessings. We understand that life is more than the passage of time on earth and death isn't the end of being. We know that the choice we make here on earth has eternal consequences. But we also know the choice that God is pleading with us to make, too. It is to choose life over death. To choose him over the world. It is to choose the freedom under his obedience rather than slavery under sin. God is pleading with us to choose him because he first chose us and that choice led to sacrifices that he had to make in order to keep us! If he has given so much for us, why would we not want to choose him, and life with him, over anything else?

To be or not to be was never the question. To be God's children or not to be God's children – that was *always* the question, for Israel and also for us. And if we chose to be his child, if we choose life over death, then we choose:

Loving him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength. We choose acknowledging the value that he places on our lives and responding to it through worship. Loving God with our whole heart means meeting him in his Word and at his table because we know that he loves us too much to lose us and so will bestow on us his grace through these means.

Choosing life over death also means walking in his ways. It means being a disciple of Jesus – a follower of the one who gave his life to give us life. It means learning about him, teaching about him, and speaking about him. It means trusting that he knows what is best for us and that he offers it to us through our obedience to him.

Choosing life over death also means clinging to him through prayer. It means finding freedom in placing the stresses and decisions into his hands instead of clinging to them in our own. It means trusting that the decisions he *does* make are ones that bring us closer to him, now and for eternity.

You see, choosing life is all about choosing God. To be God's child or not, that is the question. And how you answer it will determine your own life and death.

Please pray with me.

Lord,

You called Israel to choose life over death – a life of freedom through obedience to you. You ask the same of us. Give us the will and desire to submit to your authority in all things and trust that through it we will one day experience life in your presence.

Amen