

Title: “Choose Life; It will Cost You.”

Chris Ryan

Deut. 30:19b, Luke 14:25-33

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

Deuteronomy teaches that there is no middle ground: either life with God or death apart from him. Jesus makes clear that choosing life in him comes at a cost of everything we are and have. Yet, in him alone is true (and eternal) life freely given.

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.

Lutherans bristle at the phrase “choose life” because we know salvation isn’t our choice — it’s God’s. He chose us, called us, made us his own. So how do we process the words of Moses when he says, “Choose life?”

Let’s first travel back in history to the time where Israel was preparing to enter the Promised Land. Moses was reminding the nation who they were.

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. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰loving 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.”

A people on the cusp of receiving what God had long promised. And in his speech, Moses places Israel at a crossroads: life or death, blessing or curse. But this “choice” is not like selecting between two equal options. Rather it is really a reminder of the covenant that God made to them: Israel can only choose life because God has *already* chosen them, redeemed them from Egypt, fed them in the wilderness, and stayed with them the entire time. Only because they were first chosen can them “choosing life” even be an option! In other words, the choice that Moses is *really* presenting is this: do the people cling to the God who has first clung to them or do they reject and turn from him? Will they receive the blessings that he offers or will they turn from him and go their own way?

Israel stood at the edge of the Promised Land. For us, we stand at the edge of eternity. For them it was Canaan; for us it is heaven. And the choice is not whether we become God’s people — He has already claimed us in baptism — but whether we cling to him, choosing life or reject him, choosing death.

You might answer, “Of course we don’t reject Jesus, we are Christians, after all. We choose life; we choose to receive the gift of salvation offered to us.” But here is where Jesus’ words in Luke stop us short. He teaches:

²⁶“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

These words are jarring. Jesus is not telling us to despise our families or hate our own lives in a cruel sense. He is showing us that even the deepest human loyalties must come second to him. Choosing Christ means bearing a cross; it means surrendering all that competes with him. And this is where we pause: if choosing life in Jesus costs everything, what makes it worth it?

The answer is this: the life he gives is greater than anything he asks us to surrender. Life in Christ is not just a promise for someday, it is a reality today. And it began when we were baptized. In that moment God brought us into communion with him, grafted us onto his son so that we could receive the reconciliation that was earned through his blood sacrifice on the cross. You see for those who are baptized, choosing life means experiencing the joy of God’s grace – today, tomorrow, and every day as we await the time when we will live fully in the kingdom of God. Choosing life means realizing that God chose you, called you by name, adopted you as his own, promised you an inheritance, and made you a brother of his beloved son. And when the weight of this reality takes root in your heart, when you begin to see how it has completely transformed you from enemy to child, and when you constantly experience his blessings in your life, you can’t *help* but prioritize this over and above all earthly things.

This is the life worth choosing – not because we made it possible but because Jesus made it possible.

So what does it mean to “choose life”? It does not mean you decide to save yourself. It means living daily in the reality that Christ has saved you, that he has reordered your life around himself, and that nothing—no possession, no relationship, not even death—can take away the life he has given.

Israel stood on the plains of Moab. We stand on the threshold of eternity. And the word of the Lord still calls out: *“Choose life, that you may live ... for the Lord is your life and length of days.”*

So stand firm in Christ, your life—now and forever.

Please pray with me.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are our life and our salvation. Teach us each day to cling to you above all else, even when following you is costly. Strengthen us in our baptismal life, that we may live in your forgiveness now and look with joy to the promised land to come. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.