

Every Moment Matters

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Introduction

Deuteronomy 30 contains the final words of Moses before he goes up onto Mt. Nebo. He will be able to see the Promised Land, but because of his disobedience in the wilderness, this great man of the faith will not be able to enter it. The speech here, which takes most of chapters 29-30, is his final thoughts.

This got me thinking about those last moments. This led me to a blog by Alvin Alexander. He is not someone famous, just an ordinary guy who posts his thoughts on his personal blog.

On May 22, 2016, he wrote these words:

Before I write this, just to be clear, on most days and times I'm not laying in bed waiting to die. But there have been somewhere between 20-30 times where I have laid down in bed not knowing if I'd ever get up again. Recent lab tests also show that I may have something called a paraganglioma, which doctors refer to as a "pharmacologic time bomb." So while I'm not laying on my death bed 24x7, I can tell you what my thoughts have been when I laid there, not knowing if I was about to die.

First, because I have a little bit of money (not a lot, but some), my initial thought was, "If I live through this, I need to have a Will drawn up so I can control how my money is disbursed when I die." So that was a first thing I did.

The second thing I can say is that all you really have is this moment. I've passed out five times now, and all I try to do in those last moments is to pay attention to the present moment, whatever it is. If you've ever worked in a job where you were the last person out of the building, and right before you left you would look around, then turn off the lights and close the door, that moment is just like that, except that this time when you close the door, you'll be closing it for the last time.

What I can tell you from my own experience is that life is a series of moments that are strung together, and one day that string comes to an end. If you have time to think in those moments just before the end, you'll find yourself reflecting back on those moments, primarily the pleasant memories and the regrets. Hopefully you will have used your moments wisely. (Alvin Alexander)

Like this blogger all Moses had left was "today." And he very clearly understood the importance of it. In fact, four times in the six verses of our text Moses refers to that day, and as he spoke:

#1: HE OFFERED A CHOICE



*See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.
(Deuteronomy 30:15)*

At first glance that doesn't seem like a hard choice for me to make: Life and prosperity vs. death and destruction. Who signs up for death and destruction?

The reality is that no one chooses that. It is something we all already have. Death and destruction come naturally to us. As difficult as it is for us to believe, when that sweet little baby is brought forward to the baptismal font, my task is to remind us that:

We are born children of a fallen humanity ... (LBW, p. 121)

Death and destruction are the consequences of being born. We don't have to choose it. It is already ours. That shouldn't surprise us. Look around. Watch the news. Read the paper.

Moses, on his final day of life, tells the people "It doesn't have to be that way. Death and destruction do not have to be the words that define your life. You have choice." You can choose "life and prosperity." Please understand that word correctly. Moses is not preaching a prosperity gospel like some of our televangelists are prone to do.

During the presidential campaign of 1928, a circular published by the Republican Party claimed that if Herbert Hoover won the election there would be "a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage." He won, of course, and seven months later the stock market crashed and we entered the Great Depression.

Moses isn't promising chickens either. He is, however, promising what Jesus Himself promised in John 10:10:

My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. (John 10:10, NLT)

#2: HE ISSUED AN INSTRUCTION

Lest they question the seriousness of the offer, Moses follows up with a word of instruction. "I command you ..."

For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws ... (Deuteronomy 30:16)

That was my Dad's strategy too. He'd say to my brother and me "Boys, I like you to get your chores done right after breakfast." Do you hear the choice there? It's what he would like. And then he would follow up with "And just to make sure we understand each other, you are not leaving the house today until they are done." Dad meant business, and so did Moses.

But this was no ordinary instruction issued by Moses, for you cannot command a matter of the heart. You can command people's actions, but you can't command their hearts. But nevertheless, that is what Moses does.

For I command you today to love the Lord your God ... (Deuteronomy 30:16)

Moses knew from his own firsthand experience that if the people were ever to fully experience the rich and satisfying life Moses offered to them, it had to start with a loving relationship with the God who would make it possible.

We know that phrase, don't we? It's the Great Commandment, according to Jesus:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. (Luke 10:27)

The ability to make the right choice and to follow the instruction starts with a loving relationship. If I don't love God, I'll never obey Him. If I don't love my dad, I won't do what he asks either.

#3: HE PROVIDED A WARNING

This time he doesn't use the word "today" but refers to "this day." Same thing.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. (Deuteronomy 30:17-18)

There's the heart thing again. If your heart turns away, that will lead to disobedience and disobedience ultimately leads to destruction.

I think Moses must have been speaking from his own experience at this point. If you know the story of Moses, you know that he was banned from entering the Promised Land because he himself chose the path of disobedience. (If you don't know the story, please come on Wednesday nights!) His disobedience resulted in death and destruction in his own life. And he didn't want to see that happen to these people.

But it is precisely what did happen. The people of Israel started out strong. They conquered the Promised Land. They claimed it as their own. But then they turned away from God and began to worship idols and the false gods of the societies around them. Death and destruction ensued, and they ended up in captivity.

Do you see a parallel in your own life? Don't things work better when you choose to do what God wants rather than what you want?

#4: HE REQUESTED A RESPONSE

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life... (Deuteronomy 30:19)

His successor Joshua made a similar plea to the children of Israel when he retired from leadership many years later. Many of you have Joshua's words posted in your houses.

*Choose for yourselves **this day** whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)*

Notice "this day." Same choice. It's a different "today," but it is still today.

APPLICATION

Jesus echoed the same theme in His teachings to His disciples:

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

Today you made the choice to come to worship. Good for you! Your neighbors and all the cars you passed along the way saw your lights shine as you drove here.

- But there is still a lot of day left. What choices will you make?
- What about when tomorrow becomes today?

This is Stewardship Month. Throughout this month we are asking you to celebrate with all of us that wonderful ways in which you have been blessed and been a blessing through this Grace congregation. Celebrate Grace!

God gives to each of us 24 hours a day, 1,440 minutes, 86,400 seconds. How will your faith shine through the time God has given you? What choices will you make?

Amen.