Deuteronomy 30:19-20 “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life…”

This particular section is so challenging. Deuteronomy is a book where Moses is getting ready to depart this world as the Lord has told him. As he is getting ready, his concern is for the people of Israel, this group that as kids had been freed from the slavery of Egypt. A group that had watched God’s judgment upon their parents as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Remember God had decreed that all of that generation of parents of the Exodus, because of their persistent disobedience and defiance of God, until they died out, the people of Israel would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Can you imagine what that must have been like? Wandering around, watching a whole generation of people die because of ungodliness! Your parents and their friends dying, as you wait to have God fulfill his promise of the Promised Land.

And yet that generation of kids who were now the leaders, were not filled with bitterness and hatred for the Lord, but were filled with faith and love for the Lord. They understood their parents sin, understood the Lord’s graciousness and His righteous judgment upon their parents and these kids grew up with a solid faith and confidence in the Lord.

So now, as they get ready to approach the Promised Land, they also learn that Moses will be taken from them too. For Moses was forbidden from entering the land, because of dishonoring God. So Moses is getting ready to die. God will show him the land and then God will take Moses to himself.

In all of this Moses is not concerned for himself, but rather for the people of Israel. He knows the temptations and follies of the world. He knows the difficulty of the years ahead for them in conquering and settling the land. Moses knows the lure of the world to abandon the true God and to follow the false gods that appear more appealing and more in keeping with human needs and wants. So Moses spends considerable time in the encouragement of his people. He reminds them of God’s goodness and love. He reviews with them God’s Laws, all of them, the civil, ceremonial and moral laws that were to be their guide and help. He spurs them on to faithfulness and trust in the Lord God now and always!

Our chapter and its readings are the pinnacle of what Moses desires for his people. The words are forceful. The choice presented is not shades of grey but the clear light and dark choice of faith. Let’s you and I contemplate these words and take the challenge of applying them to ourselves. Our theme will be: **THE CHALLENGE! 1st. Blessing and curses! 2nd. Life. 3rd. Love!**

Now I think that to fully understand this particular section you need to realize what is said in verses 11-14. This section is important because it gives the base direction that every choice presented before us is to take. In other words, if it wasn’t for what is said in verses 11-14, I don’t think there is a challenge or a choice or anything positive to discuss or consider. Those verses say this: **“Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.”**

Do you see why I say this is the base direction? The first thing Moses does is remind these people that they have something that is found nowhere else. They have the word of God right in their midst. God has given it to them. God has revealed himself and has shown these people the scope of his love, marvel, wonder and his will. The Word of God was in their possession and it is this Word of God that makes the challenge before them realistic. They didn’t have to guess at God’s heart and desire. They didn’t have to make anything up about God’s will and purpose for them. All of these things were before them. God had given it to them. And in this Word was found the power and motivation to accept and carry out the challenge now set before them.

What is the challenge? It is found in that first verse of our section, **“I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.”** There it is. Here is the challenge found before every soul of this world. What do you desire? Do you want life or death? Do you want blessings or curses? That’s what confronts us in this earthly life. God has put us here, has created us unique and wonderful, in the circumstances around us, for the sole purpose of meeting and contemplating this challenge!

Let’s start with the second set first. Do you want blessings or curses? Do you want your world filled with good, with things positive and upbeat, with the wonders and marvels of God as yours? That’s what is being offered! God’s blessings! God being with you, watching over you, and making all things serve your good. God teaching contentment, bringing you joy, filling your life with his treasures and riches not just for now, but for all eternity? Now, I want you to realize that God’s blessings can include hardship and trials, difficulties and disease, and the other bland things of the world. The point is, when God is on your side, when God is taking care of you it is all working and serving for your eternal good and salvation. God is working to bring you to His Kingdom, to make you His child and an heir of eternal life. That’s why I started with this set because in reality this idea of blessings also includes the wonder and marvel of life. Not just life here, but true life. A life of light and love, joy and happiness because you grasp and know the eternal blessings of God in Jesus! Do you want God’s blessings!

Or do you want curses? A life filled with despair and darkness. A life where hope is fleeting and joy is but temporary, depending on what fun is going on. And have you ever noticed that the world’s ideas on happiness and joy when fully indulged in, usually leads to destruction and bedevilment? Go ahead, follow the world and its desires. Do drugs and alcohol, have sex with everyone and everything, live only for the moment and its thrill, make sure all your lust and desires, wants and perversities are met and pretty soon you will find your life one big sink hole. Seriously, just look around at the world. The curses are horrid and only lead to death. Not just physical death, but death in the sense of permanent separation from God. A death where there is no longer a single trace of God’s love or light but just the darkness, despair and horror of hell! Is that what you want? Curses?

Notice that next line just pleads with you, literally begs you to make the right choice. It says, **“Now choose life!”** We get a little lost in thinking of this because as humans we really don’t know the truth of life as it is. That’s why I pointed you to the base of all of this, God’s Word. God’s Word directs you in and to life. God’s Word shows you the path and then directs you on that path. God’s Word provides the motivation, the strength, and hope of this life. Let me remind you how.

For the Jews, they had the Law of God. That law was basically designed to point out sin and the fact that we can’t measure up to God’s demand of perfection. But that Law also contained the ceremonial laws, those laws of worship and service to God that were designed to point to the grace, mercy and love of God found in the promised Savior and His work. These people weren’t left hopeless. They were directed to the same source you and I are directed to. The Savior. The Promised redeemer of God who would cleanse our sins, grants us a whole new status before God and yes, who would offer us surely and wonderfully the gift of Life. The only difference is that the Jewish people were to look forward the Savior and his work and we are to look back at the Savior and his work. Either way, whether we are speaking of Old Testament people or New Testament people, the means of salvation is exactly the same. It would be the Savior! God’s grace, mercy and life revealed in the Savior.

So to choose life means to turn to that Word of God. To hear the promises of God, to listen to the fact that God has and continues to declare his love and grace to us in every way. God knew our sinful condition, knew we were dead in trespass and sin and God in love took every step to give us this life! He did it completely and fully in Jesus. Yes, that same old thing, Pastor repeats again and again. That Jesus lived the perfect life we could not. That Jesus offered himself in our stead on the cross, there paying for our sins in full and thus granting us the wonderful gift of forgiveness and life.

Now when we speak of that life, I, in my head, based on God’s Word think of two results that this LIFE from Jesus brings. First, this life brings me contentment and joy in this earthly life. No matter what is going on I always know that Jesus is with me, watching over me, guarding, protecting and leading me in the paths of righteousness for his names sake. With Jesus on my side there is nothing I can’t take and nothing I have to fear or dread. All of this because as Paul says, **“I consider our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”** (Ro. 8:18).

And when I think of life I know it to mean the eternal life found in and with Jesus. The glory of heaven that is mine in Jesus. The wonders of eternal perfection cradled by the Lord God in a perpetual state of holiness and wonder. All because of Jesus. This is life, the true life that Jesus gives. Did you not catch what the text said? **“For the Lord is your life!”** That’s what Jesus is, our life. If we don’t grasp that or understand his total blessing in our life, the Life he is for us and causes in us, then your faith is having a problem. Our life in Jesus is sure, certain and awesome in every way. Yes, Jesus is our Life!

Finally our last part speaks to us of love. As we speak of the life we have in Jesus, of the wonder and awe of salvation sure and free because of his victory the end result is love. But remember, **“We love because He first loved us.”** In Jesus we are free to grasp true love. Free to know that love, practice that love, be moved and motivated by that love. It is God’s love poured upon us through the Holy Spirit who works in us through the gospel in Word and sacrament. Love true and wonderful. Love from God that as we grasp it and have it fill us, it just makes this world bearable and better. Because in truth, God’s love in our lives just makes our lives absolutely better. This text simply encourages us, **“Love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.”**

That love that we have from God is one where we listen and in listening we hold steadfast. It is so because we grasp that we are filled with love from God. Yes, God fills us and moves us to grasp his majesty and believe! Again, this love makes our life better.

Ask husbands and wives who practice and know this love. Ask those kids whose parents are the very example of God’s love in their lives, ask them how comforting and empowering is that love of Christ shared and practiced in their lives. I could go on and on with how this love of God impacts us and changes us. How it colors our world and gives us hope and peace. How it balances out, in our favor, the struggles and turmoils of this world because love overcomes all. This love is seen and realized most fully in Jesus and what He has done for us. The bottom line is that I don’t think you know how to love or even begin to love until you have grasped the wonder of Jesus. His love overflows and abounds in everything for our good.

So there is the challenge. What shall it be? Life or death? Blessings or curses? God’s gift of life and love or what the world offers? I say, with our Lord, “Choose life?” Amen.