Deuteronomy 30:15 See now, today I have set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster.

During the recent Pastors conference held in Saginaw we pastors broke into groups and worked on an exegetical study of four different texts. It was a good thing to do. I say that because as we did our work, it amazed me at just how much is found in each individual text. One guy might not see it all, but when you have nine guys who work in the original language, you might hear nine guys point out an aspect of the text that the other eight didn’t think about or see. It was an awesome use of our time.

One of the insights of the text that we were studying was summed up by one of our men. He spoke of the reaction of people to Jesus and what he said, I think, is absolutely the truth. He said this: “When you encounter Jesus, no matter how, you have one of two reactions to make. Either you will grasp that he is the Son of God, the Lord Almighty walking this earth for our salvation or you think he is a complete fraud and the biggest waste of time there is. There is no middle ground here. You can’t say, “Yes, I believe Jesus is God and Lord and then proceed to ignore, dismiss, cast aside, disparage or not follow what he says! You can’t do that because if you confess he is God and Lord, then grasp that you owe this God and Lord absolutely everything. He is the Lord God! But if you reject Jesus, then he is nothing. He is a fraud to be ignored and laughed at. He is false and of no account. You do not have to hear him, follow him, worship him or even give one ounce of respect to him. He is a false prophet, a crazy man, a person whose life is meaningless and hopeless. There is no other response. Do you think you can declare him God and then live like he is nothing? Make no mistake, there is only one of two possible responses that every human must make when they encounter Jesus!”

Now if you think that his words are a little “out there” and a bit too forceful, then I will submit to you that the very same point was made about God already back in the days of the Old Testament. Our text is one where you need to think about your response to the Lord God. And notice that the response has only two choices. Not dozens. No half-hearted reactions. Each person needs to make one of the two responses to the Lord God. It was true in the days of Moses and this text and it is still true in the days of Jesus and our lives. Our theme will be: **WHAT SHALL IT BE: LIFE OR DEATH!**

Let me give you the context of these words. It is Moses speaking, guided by the Holy Spirit. Moses has been told that he is about to die and the leadership of the Jews turned over to Joshua. The Jewish people have wandered in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula for the past 40 years and now they are getting ready to enter into the Promised Land, as God had promised their forefathers. A couple of things to remember here. Moses is not permitted to enter because he dishonored God before the people. The Lord allowed him to see the land from a mountain top, but he was not permitted to enter. Then remember that the previous generation of people were also not permitted to enter the Promised Land. That’s because when they had the chance to go in, 40 years earlier, they showed their lack of faith and confidence in the Lord God. God had said they would wander in the wilderness until that generation of unbelievers had died out. Now, the new generation had taken over. By the way, do you see a pattern there? Believe and follow or don’t believe and miss out. It is the new generation that now must determine what they will do.

I know, you think God was a bit harsh in his judgments. Was He? The previous generation had seen firsthand the power and majesty of God. They had experienced how God gained their freedom from slavery in Egypt. They saw, witnessed, and were a part of the ten plagues, including the night of Passover when the blood of a lamb saved the members of your household. They were witness to the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night as they traveled. They crossed the sea with walls of water on both sides to gain their final escape and saw Egypt’s army drowned. They experienced water from a rock, manna, and countless times of God acting among them for their good. They were eye witnesses of the majesty and marvel of God and still they did not, they would not trust and be confident in the goodness and power of the Lord God Almighty. Now tell me you think God was too hard on them. It was clear by their lives and actions that they had chosen death. God had chosen them. God had freed them by miracle after miracle and still they had refused to believe and trust in the Lord God. If you chose death, don’t be surprised when God grants your wish!

It was now time for the new generation to show what their response would be. Remember, this generation was the kids of the previous generation. In many cases they too saw the miracles and wonders of the Lord God that their parents had ignored. It was clear to them that God had chosen them, God had called them to be his. Yes, God has shown them his marvel and majesty, they had lived 40 years in the wilderness experiencing the miraculous blessings of the Lord. They had been given spiritual life from the Lord God and now God, through Moses, was reminding them of the response they had before them. Chose the life I have given you. Chose to hear, obey and follow the commands of the Lord your God or chose death. Reject God, reject his power and might, reject his grace and love and cast aside God for the false gods and idols of the world. Really the choice before every soul is just that. Keep the life, the spiritual life and wonder of faith that God has given you or chose spiritual suicide and death. Chose the light or live in the darkness. Be a child of God or a slave of Satan.

Again let me remind you there is no other response to be had. Either God is God and your Lord and Master or He is not! It is a spiritual impossibility to declare: “I believe in God but I will not worship him in his church as He has commanded…I believe in God but I will decide what is good and right, how I want to live my life, not God…I believe in God but I do not believe the Bible to be His Word and true in everything it says, I just can’t believe that God could give us a written flawless record of His saving grace!” You know I could go on and on this way. We have all had set before us life and prosperity or death and disaster.

My dear people, you too have this set before you. The Lord our God has promised, sent, and delivered to you a Savior. This Savior, Jesus, is true God and true man, come to give his life for our sins, come to grant us the gift of eternal life and salvation and come to be a power and influence in our lives. Are you going to gaze at the cross, contemplate the horror of what happened there and then declare to Jesus…I shall live in my sin and enjoy it…I shall do what I want, so don’t tell me what to do, Jesus, God and Lord. By the way, do you actually hear the unbelief, sense the very darkness of that statement? I know most of us would never make that exact statement but isn’t that exactly what we are doing every time we decide for sin, any sin in our lives? Go back and read that again and see if you don’t grasp the unbelief and darkness of that sentence.

Jesus has come and died for you. Jesus gave his very life for you, suffered the spiritual death of eternal damnation for you and you are going to respond by saying…No thanks Jesus? What does our text say of this? Verses 17-18: “**But if your heart turns away, and you do not listen, and you are lured away, and you bow down to other gods and serve them, 18then I declare to you today that you will most certainly perish.”** What are you going to say, “If God is going to judge me, I am not going to believe in Him?” God sent his Son to save you. God reveals and lays forth for you in every page of Scripture his love, grace, care and compassion for you and you spurn that? I submit that God has every right, perfect right, is perfectly just in his judgment. God has given you life in Jesus and you chose death?

What God calls upon us to do is not hard or difficult. His first command is simple: believe in Him. He has given ample evidence of his being, has left a record of his works and actions on our behalf. That’s the first thing, believe in Him. God has called you to faith by his Holy Spirit. He has opened our heart and minds to his majesty and glory through the means of grace, the Gospel in Word and sacrament. Read God’s Word, from beginning to end, if you can see it, God had poured out his love and grace just so you could be called to faith and given the gifts of God. Seriously, in the same way that the people in our text had before them the power and majesty of God so do you. It is found in His Word. It is wrapped up in Jesus the living Word. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that we were dead but made alive, blind but see, slaves to sin but now the children of God. God gives us faith and asks us to keep that faith. He helps in that too!

Just as the Israelites of old had the knowledge of God before them, so do we. They had manna every morning and quail every night from God. Sadly many of them just complained of God’s goodness. God provided them water in so many different ways so they could live. Scripture tells us that even their sandals and clothing did not wear out during that 40 years of wandering. Again, how sad that a whole generation of Israelites chose death. We have similar blessings before us too.

Look at the front of the church, what do you see. See that cross so prominent in front. How can you look upon a cross and not think of what Jesus has done for you, his sacrifice and love, his rising from the dead to proclaim you his forgiven child? Or look at the altar. Do you know that altar is there to remind you of the Lord. Here is what our Christian Worship Manual has to say. *“Just as the ark of the covenant, placed in the temple’s Most Holy Place, was the visible symbol of God’s presence in the Old Testament, so the altar also symbolizes that God is present with his people in Word and sacrament.”* Now do you see why the altar is central? Do you see what is on the altar? Look at the candelabras. Those aren’t just there for decoration, but to remind us that Christ is the light of the world, our light to help us shine. Or did you ever just give thought to why we worship? Again from the book Christian Worship Manual. *“The gospel of Jesus is surely the power that generates the life of the church, but worship is the proof of the power. In worship the church inhales; it receives forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation given by the Father in the means of grace through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. But in worship the church also exhales: it offers its sacrifice of praise to the Father through the Son in the Spirit.* (page50). How can Thursday night or Sunday morning come and you think, “Nah, I don’t want to worship God or hear how He has forgiven my sins in Jesus!” God has given us church to keep that challenge alive and well in Jesus.

Listen again to God’s challenge found in verses 19-20. **“I call the heavens and the earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live 20by loving the Lord your God, by listening to his voice, and by clinging to him, because that means life for you, and you will live a long life on your land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”**

The Lord has called us in the same way. We have been given the gift of life in Jesus, spiritual life, true life, yes, eternal life. Jesus has paid for our sins and with that act of grace continues to send into our lives the Holy Spirit to keep this gift alive and well by working in us through the Gospel in Word and sacrament. Remember, Jesus is what the Sabbath day was all about. Our salvation and redemption by the grace of God through faith in God’s promises. We have been given life. Choose to stay in that life. Choose to serve the Lord with your worship and praise, your offerings and with your care and compassion for one another. Choose life, the life that Jesus has given you. The life that leads to and does give eternal life. This is still our challenge even in today’s world: Life or death. May your choice be life, to keep the life that God has given. To keep your faith true and strong, how did our text say this would be? “B**y loving the Lord your God, by listening to his voice, and by clinging to him, because that means life for you.”** God guide you in your life in Jesus. Amen.