

Mo Blessings Mo Problems sermon series
Have It Your Way - Deut. 30:11-20
August 3, 2025
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You remember the game show “Let’s Make a Deal”? I know they revived it but I’ll always remember the original version with Monte Hall as the host. Monte would present a contestant with three doors and they’d have to choose one. Behind one door was a brand new Chevy Nova, behind the second was a dinette set, and behind the third was a rubber chicken. And the contestant would have to choose. And no one wanted to get the rubber chicken. In a world that is overrun with choices for us to make, how do we know we’re making the right one?

We’re coming near the end of our sermon series on Moses. We’ve traveled with him from the Nile River to the burning bush, back to Egypt to free the slaves and through the parted waters of the Red Sea, up the mountain to receive God’s word and back down to deal with the whiny Israelites. Now, we’re getting close to the end. The finish line is in sight. Next week – spoiler alert! - we’ll attend Moses’ funeral, but today, he’s got one more thing to say.

The book of Deuteronomy is a collection of Moses’ last words to these people with whom he has spent the last 40 years. It’s basically a 34-chapter sermon, so no complaints if I go a minute or two long, ok? Moses recounts the history of the Israelites and then proceeds to restate the laws given to him by God on Mt. Sinai. In a sense, Moses is trying to help the Israelites remember how they got to where they are and the purpose for all they had been through. And, in the end, he tells them they have a choice to make.

Remember the self-serve frozen yogurt craze that hit Lexington about a decade ago? I think there’s one left down on Tiverton. Out of the blue, these little storefronts started popping up all over. You’d go in and get your cup, then you’d choose from 12 different yogurts and 72 different toppings. I usually chose two different yogurts and 71 different toppings – I didn’t want to be too greedy. I can promise you my choices had consequences. Sometimes having a lot of choices isn’t always the best option.

My overflowing yogurt cup is proof that it is our human nature to abuse this freedom of choice. When given a choice, we don’t always choose wisely. I wonder if that’s why God took choice away from the Israelites as they were wandering through the desert trying to make it to the Promised Land. God didn’t overwhelm them with a buffet of yogurts and toppings every day. God simply said, “You can eat whatever you want, as long as it is manna.” By removing frivolous choices, it helped the Israelites focus in on the choices that were most important and reminded them of who gave them the ability to choose in the first place.

It’s a bit like what we do each Sunday, isn’t it? We gather together to sing songs and hear scripture and tell stories to remind us of who we are and the One who created and called us. It’s easy to forget those essential truths when you’re busy wandering around in the desert or navigating the busy Lexington roads. Whether you’re dealing with cranky Israelites or cranky toddlers, worried about collecting your daily manna or making it to the grocery store in time for dinner, sometimes it’s easy to forget the essence of why we live and breathe. We face dozens of choices every day, but the decision to faithfully

follow Christ and try to become more like him each day is the one that informs all the others.

By the time we get to Chapter 30 of Deuteronomy, Moses has just about exhausted everything he has to say. He has sweated and cried and danced for joy and slumped in agony for 40 years, and he's coming to the end of his final words in his final sermon. So, he wants to give the Israelites one last chance to sign their name on the dotted line. Moses lays out the terms, putting it in contractual language that would have been familiar to the Israelites. In order for an agreement to be struck in those times, witnesses were required. So, Moses says, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses." This is the ultimate choice for the Israelites. And then Moses calls for the sale: "Choose life."

That two-word statement is basically what Moses has been building toward for 29 chapters. He is asking for a total commitment from the Israelites, asking them to give their whole heart and soul and mind and strength to God. This is not something you just drift into; this is not the kind of thing you inadvertently stumble upon. I was talking to a former church member who was always a little obtuse and I asked him how things were going. He said, "Well, I woke up the other day and found myself engaged."

Being engaged is not something that happens while you're asleep. I think you pretty much have to be an active participant in the creation of the engagement. That's what Moses is saying to the Israelites here. You can't just go along assuming you're in relationship with God or wishfully hoping you are. "I woke up the other day and found myself following Jesus." There is an intentional decision involved.

Moses is asking the Israelites to make that decision, to give their lives to God. And he lays out the contractual terms as simply as possible. If you choose to follow God, you will live. This means more than your heart will continue beating and your lungs will continue breathing. To choose life means to live in all the fullness God has planned for us, not to just exist or go through the motions, but to experience life in God as a blessing. But if you choose not to follow God, you will perish, maybe not physically, but certainly spiritually. This is not a plea or a threat; it's a statement of fact. If you walk out a second-story window, you'll fall. If you cut your hand, you'll bleed. If you willfully turn away from the light, you choose to live in the dark.

The Israelites should know this. They've been doing it for years. The fact that they turned away from God and toward a golden calf is part of the reason it's taken them 40 years to get to this place. All of us have turned away from God at some point in our lives, whether for a split second or a decade. We have waxed and waned in our commitment to God, in our prayer life, in our worship attendance. We do that because God has given us the freedom to do that, and we don't always choose wisely.

What decisions do we make each day to "choose life" and to make our ways God's ways? Maybe it's time alone in the morning to read or pray; maybe is time spent in nature, surrounding ourselves with God's creation; maybe it's time spent serving someone else or sharing God's love. Whatever it is, each day the choice Moses put in front of the Israelites is the choice that's put in front of us, a choice between life and death, a choice between blessings and curses. We know in our hearts what it is that blesses us and what it is that curses us. We know what choices we make that give life and what choices we make that hasten spiritual, if not physical, death. The truth of the matter is that sometimes it's easier to choose the easy god, the comfortable god, the controllable

god, the self-serving god, the pleasurable god. There are plenty of other gods to which we bow down and serve. Those are the gods of death. We're not ignorant; we know that we're doing it and we know there are consequences, no matter how much we try to rationalize it. We know when we choose death.

This passage is a simple reminder that each and every day we are awake and alive, we have this choice. And we won't always make the right one, will we? Sometimes we will say or do things that separate us from God. Sometimes we might feel like God is far off, and that we have made so many bad choices that there's no hope of ever being reconciled with God. But Moses says if we choose life, God will find us and bring us back. No matter how many wrong choices we have made, it's never too late to make the right one. No matter how many times we choose death, whether it's once or a hundred times, God never gives up on us, always putting the choice before us again. It's never too late to choose life so that we may live.

That, more than anything, is what I believe God wants for us. God wants us to live. God wants us to enjoy the blessings of being in God's favor. God wants our love and obedience and loyalty and joy. Each day God wants us to wake up and choose God all over again. Just doing it once was not enough. Every day we need to find the courage and the strength to say to God, "Have it your way." That's hard, because God's plan for our lives is not always our idea of a good time. And yet, over and over again we learn that when we try to have it our way, we perish.

So the choice is before us again. Life and prosperity, death and adversity. If we follow the commandments and guidance of God, we will live. If we don't pay attention to God and try to do life on our own, we will perish. That's the facts. Notice, we never hear from the Israelites what they choose to do. There's never a decision given. Instead, the choice is just left hanging out there, waiting to be answered.