

## Bible Tuesday for Pentecost 13, 2019

### Deuteronomy 30:15-20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. <sup>16</sup>If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God\* that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup>But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup>I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup>I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup>loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' final sermon to Israel. Moses delivers this sermon at the verge of the Jordan River, as the Israelites prepare to finally end their wilderness wondering and reenter the Promised Land of their ancestors. Moses' final sermon summarizes all the law that God relayed to Moses for the 40 days that Moses was alone with God on Mt. Horeb/Mt. Sinai, while the Israelites were creating and worshiping the golden calf. Moses presents God's law to the Israelites as a covenant. In this covenant, Yahweh offers to be God, continue to protect, prosper, nurture, and lead Israel. Israel is to obey this Law that Moses just laid out, including keeping kosher houses, keeping strict sabbath laws, wearing kosher clothes, keep the Passover and all other festivals and holy days, etc. Moses promises that entering into the covenant with God is entering into life: full, rich, satiating shalom. But the Israelites are given a choice to walk away from this covenant. Moses states that life outside this covenant is life away from God, filled with false gods and death. Note, neither Moses nor Yahweh threaten punishment to Israelites who turn their back on this covenant. Instead, life away from God is described.

"love" – This does not refer to an emotion but rather faithfulness to a covenant, to a relationship.

### Psalm 1

Happy are those  
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
<sup>2</sup> but their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law they meditate day and night.  
<sup>3</sup> They are like trees  
planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,

and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.

- <sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
<sup>6</sup> for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalms 1 is part of a few psalms which were written to frame the psalter. While many psalms are attributed to King David, this one is not. Instead it boldly describes a basic tenet of ancient Hebrew faith, good people always follow God and wicked people always ignore God and go their own failing way.

“Happy” – This is a translation of the Hebrew “shr” which has nothing to do with how one feels but instead refers to advancing, progressing, with a hint of prospering.

“teaching of the Lord” – This phrase is translated from “Torah”, which is Hebrew for “law” and specifically Law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible.

“meditate” – Meditation tends to be thought of as quiet, still, alone time spent in deep thought, something that subsistence farmers, herdsman, and slaves never had time to do. Ancient Israelites understood meditating to be grappling, arguing, and debating; activities that could be engaged while working, and certainly in community.

In the Bible, the image of the tree is a common symbol for Israel. Jesus speaks of the fig tree that is not bearing fruit, curses the barren fig tree, and speaks of tiny seeds growing into grand shrubs that shelter birds, all of which were images for Israel. Revelation speaks of the tree of life also planted by water, bearing different fruit in each month and whose leaves create healing ointment for all peoples.

#### Philemon 1-21

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,  
To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, <sup>2</sup>to Apphia our sister, <sup>\*</sup> to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house:

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> When I remember you <sup>\*</sup> in my prayers, I always thank my God <sup>5</sup>because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we <sup>\*</sup> may do for Christ. <sup>7</sup>I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

<sup>8</sup> For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, <sup>9</sup>yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. <sup>\*</sup> <sup>10</sup>I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. <sup>11</sup>Formerly he

was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful\* both to you and to me. <sup>12</sup>I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. <sup>13</sup>I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; <sup>14</sup>but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. <sup>15</sup>Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, <sup>16</sup>no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup>If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. <sup>19</sup>I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. <sup>20</sup>Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>21</sup>Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

This is a fascinating letter and the only one of its kind in their entire biblical canon. This is a letter from Paul and Timothy to a small cluster of people but most specifically Philemon. Onesimus appears to be a run-away slave, running away from Philemon and finding sanctuary with Paul.

Slavery in ancient Rome was in some way just like slavery in the US and in other cases quite different. Rome regularly conquered other peoples and took captives to be slaves. There were a handful of ways those slaves could gain their freedom, but it was very difficult and few were ever manumitted, just like the US prior to the Civil War. Then there was indentured slavery. Men could sell themselves, their wives, and/or one's children into slavery to earn forgiveness of a debt or a step up in society. Indentured servitude was for a specifically agreed upon length of time, after which the person was free again. Some colonists came to the US as indentured servants to pay for their voyages over.

In this letter, Paul is urging Philemon to release Onesimus from his slavery, whether indentured or permanent. The pressure Paul puts on Philemon is huge! First, this is not a personal letter to Philemon but one to the little congregation that meets in his house which would be read out loud during a worship service. Shaming and social pressure were obviously not beneath Paul! Second, Paul uses the gift of evangelism that he has been called to present to the world. Paul tells Philemon “I say nothing of your owing me your own self.” This refers to the fact that Philemon, a Gentile, became a baptized follower of Jesus through Paul. Third, Paul throw's Philemon's own words back at him. Philemon had referred to Onesimus as “useless” whereas Paul finds him useful and has come to love him like a son. Paul is telling Philemon that while Onesimus may have been useless as a slave, he is quite useful as a friend, helper, and now beloved as a sort of son.

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup>Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup>For which of you, intending to build a

tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup>Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup>saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." <sup>31</sup>Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. <sup>33</sup>So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

In an earlier parable, Jesus says, "You cannot serve two masters. You will love one and hate the other or hate the one and love the other. You cannot serve God and 'mammon' (possessions)." Jesus is using the Greek word for hate hyperbolically in this parable and the above text. Humans are regularly put in positions where we are trying to make two or more parties happy, and while it usually an impossible task, we don't usually end up hating one party and loving the other. Life is more nuanced than that. However, Jews of Jesus' day loved hyperbole and regularly used it in their writings. The point Jesus is making in discussing two masters and discussing discipleship is clear. Faithfully following Jesus is an all-consuming occupation. Anything that comes before God becomes an idol: children, careers, spouses, homes, hobbies, horses, self-fulfillment, etc. AND, human life is not possible without possessions. We must have clothes, homes, tools to grow or hunt and prepare food. When Jesus was in ministry, while he may not have owned anything but the clothes on his back, other peoples' possessions paid for his food, shelter, and facilitated his ministry.

So then what is Jesus saying in the above pericope? We can't be half assed Christians. We can't say we are doing things God's way when we are actually doing them our way. Jesus is making it clear that being is Christian is not "the road less traveled." No, following Jesus is taking the road only one man traveled, Jesus himself. None of us can do what Jesus did, but we can endeavor to follow, humbly, generously, meekly, and thank Jesus that the whole road is paved with his blood which bought grace for all creation.