

“Life and death.” We were standing on the mountains east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea while Moses gave us his final words. We were looking across the Jordan Valley into the land of abundance, the **“promised land”** that the Lord said he would be giving us. This had been the land of Abraham. But Abraham’s family, our family had failed to stay in it. In our fear, we had chosen to leave this land and move to Egypt. And there we had been slaves for 430 years. But the Lord had brought us out of Egypt and for the last 40 years we had been wandering in the wilderness. But now that time was coming to a close and we were on the verge of returning to the land that the Creator had given to Abraham. Moses was not going to be able to come with us. The Creator had forbidden Moses and all the older generation from entering this **“promised land.”** They were children of Egypt in their hearts. They had disobeyed the Lord. They had been violent. They had been hypocrites. So the Creator was only going to let Moses see the **“promised land”** from a distance.

As we stood there, Moses reminded us that our **own eyes** had seen all that the Creator had done in Egypt. We had seen all the plagues he had brought upon Pharaoh to set us free from slavery. We had seen the water of the Red Sea split in two and we had walked through those waters into freedom. We had experienced thirst and hunger in the wilderness and had seen how the Creator had provided for us. We did not have the bread or wine of Civilization to satisfy us, instead we had the Creator giving us daily manna and water in the wilderness. Our clothes and sandals did not wear out. At every turn, the Lord had given us exactly what we **needed**. And yet our hearts were still hardened, our eyes were still blind, and our ears were still deaf. We were not truly appreciating all that the Creator had done for us and was doing for us, we still complained and grumbled.

Moses warned us that if we continued on that path that we would end up like Sodom and Gomorrah. Their ruins lay right in front of us in the Jordan Valley. It was total desolation in that valley where the great civilization of Sodom had once stood. The great civilization that Abraham’s nephew Lot had chosen to live in. Sodom had been disobedient to the Creator’s Word and therefore had been wiped off the face of the earth. It was a powerful sermon illustration, hearing Moses’s warning and seeing with our own eyes that not a single building or structure of Sodom remained standing. He said if we lived like these nations and followed their **“idols of wood and stone, silver and gold,”** if we chased after buildings and money, then our land would also become dead, lifeless, and desolate.

So Moses reminded us of our one purpose, our one job, and our one task in life. He said, **“If you return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and soul, then the Lord your God will restore you.”** The land beyond the Jordan Valley was fertile, beautiful, and abundant. That was the **“promised land”** that the Creator wanted to give us. He wanted us to live in fruitful harmony with the creation, so we would thrive with the creation. But if that was going to happen then it all started with giving our hearts and souls completely to the Creator. But this seemed impossible. For 40 years we had been struggling to give the Creator our hearts and minds. How were we ever going to do this? How were we ever going to obey? True faithfulness seemed so far away and so unattainable for us. We were addicted to arrogance, fear, and violence.

Moses said to us, **“This commandment which I am giving you today is not too difficult for you. It is not in heaven, so that you have to say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us so that we may obey it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea so that you have to say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us so that we may obey it?’ On the contrary, the Word is near you. It is in your mouth, in your heart, and in your hands so you may practice it.”** We didn’t need to do anything to make this obedience happen other than surrender to the Word that was being given to us. Moses said to us, **“The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, so that you may live.”** The sign of Abraham’s covenant with the Creator was circumcision. This physical cutting away of the flesh was a sign of a deeper spiritual reality. It was not ultimately our bodies that needed circumcising, it was our **hearts**. The selfish ego that dwelled within us and controlled our hearts and minds, needed to be cut away. And we weren’t going to do this ourselves. It was the Creator’s Word that could alone do that cutting, his Word alone could circumcise our hearts, thereby transforming us from **selfish** people who destroyed the creation into generous and **loving** people who served the creation. So, yes, we could obey because the Creator’s Word had been given to us and it would circumcise our hearts.

So there we stood, with both the dead land of Sodom and the fertile land beyond it within our view. Looking at both, the Creator said to us, **“I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse, goodness and evil.”** The Lord wanted life, blessing, and goodness for us. But he wasn’t going to force us to choose that. We could reject him and his Word that he was giving us. We could choose the path of Sodom. If we listened to our flesh, to our selfish egos and listened to other voices, then death, curse, and evil would fall upon us. But if we surrendered to the Lord’s Word and loved the Lord with all our hearts and minds, then life, blessing, and goodness would be ours. Then before Moses left us, once and for all, before he wandered off to die on his own in the wilderness, he gave us his final advice, **“Choose life. Love the Lord your God, obey his voice, and hold on to him. This is your life.”**

“Life and death.” Everyday of our lives we also stand at a crossroads. Before us lie two paths. One that leads to life, blessing, and goodness and one that leads to death, curse, and evil. We have thousands of years of human examples that have gone before us. The ruins of human civilizations cover the earth. Every nation, every empire, every civilization that has ever arisen has gone the path of Sodom, trying to find life in **“idols of wood and stone, silver and gold,”** and they have all ended in death and destruction. We know that the human path of **arrogance, fear, and violence** that tries to avoid death, only leads to a literal dead end. And we also have seen Christ Jesus, the Creator’s own Son, walk a different path. We have seen his way of **faith, hope, and love** that accepts death lead to resurrection life. **“Life and death.”** The easy and wide path of the crowd which tries to avoid death, leads to death. The strenuous and narrow path of Christ that goes through death, leads to life.

Choosing life when the road is lonely, narrow, and strenuous may seem impossible to us. But the Lord tells us, **“it is not too difficult for you.”** The Creator’s Word has come to you in Christ Jesus. The Word has been made flesh. The Word dwells in your life. The Word is here in this place, **“it is in your mouth, it is in your heart, it is in your hands so you may practice it.”** The Creator’s Word made the whole universe from nothing. The Creator’s Word sustains the universe. The Creator’s Word has provided for you and protected you throughout your whole life. This Word has come to you to **“circumcise your heart”** and cut away your selfish flesh, leading you through death, so you might find true life.

The paths of **“life and death”** stand before you again this day. The decisions that lie before you today are not insignificant, they are a matter of **“life and death.”** **“Choose life.”** Choose life by letting go of yourself. Choose life by saying no to yourself. Choose life by taking up your cross and not running away from death and loss. Choose life by following Jesus. **“Choose life. Love the Lord your God, obey his voice, and hold on to him. This is your life.” Amen.**