

"It's Not hat Difficult"

February 12, 2017

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶If 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. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I 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. ¹⁹I 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, ²⁰loving 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.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

³And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? ⁴For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?

⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. ⁹For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

Matthew 5:21-37

²¹“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’³² But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’³⁴ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

I'm pausing for 30 seconds here at the beginning of this sermon. (pause)

This is the place where there's usually something humorous or a little story or some other illustration. (pause) Maybe there's an analogy offered for what comes next. (pause) Don't think an effort wasn't made. About 14 different things were typed in this space and none of them worked. Hence the pause. (pause)

Sometimes with some scriptures, like those words of Jesus in part 3 of the sermon on the mount just don't inspire anything that's 'catchy.' (pause) What can you say? Especially on a JOY Sunday with them (nod) close by. We've got an investment in them. This is the kind of stuff that might make them wonder – and us wonder – just who 'THIS' Jesus is. Just a few more seconds. (Pause)

You know while we're waiting I'm going to go talk to them. You can listen, it isn't private. (go over)

You know that most of time when we talk about Jesus we talk about most of the time is kind of like a big brother, or a pal – you guys don't say 'pal' do you? What do you call your really good friends?

Right, that's what we want you to know Jesus is. But – you kind of need to know this other stuff too. Jesus is more than that. Jesus has some – not to apply any more pressure than you already have in your life with school and home and your future and all – but Jesus has some – expectations. But you need to know this – even with the blessed are the meek and you are salt and light and 'you

have heard it said, but I say stuff – Jesus job is not to be your besty, no? Jesus job is to save you.

So this is, even though it isn't pretty, pretty important stuff. Jesus wants us to be well and happy. Jesus wants us to avoid as many pit falls in life as possible. (pause) You don't say 'pit falls' either do you? They (nod) probably don't either. (pause) .

Regardless of what we say, or believe, or do, the constant message from God has been in the past and if we care to listen, is now, very simple. Obey God and live, and possibly live well. Do the right thing and you'll be all right.

Way back when God began by giving us the torah, the law, to order society and to provide a guide for living that would result in... well, listen to what the guy in Deuteronomy says, "So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear (and here fear means a lot more than be afraid of , because God doesn't want our fright, God wants our respect) – Only to respect the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God* and his decrees that I am commanding you today, WHY? Now there's a question I know you ask. But why mom? But miss Laura why do we need to go to small group? I know you say "WHY?" soon to be followed by 'it's not fair.' So why does God want us to respect, to act all Godlike, to love God, to serve God with all our heart and with all our soul, and to keep the commandments, the rules,

the laws of the LORD your God* and his decrees that I am commanding you today – why? for your own well-being. So you can be as happy as reasonably possible.

He goes on, Choose life, this obedient life, so that you and your kids may live, loving the God, obeying God, and never letting God go, just as God holds on to you; for that means life to you maybe even a long, good life." Do the opposite. Disobey God. That's a different story. You're smart. This sounds simple enough doesn't it? Do what's required, love God with all your heart and all your soul, all for your own well being? But let me tell you like were _____ it's radically difficult.

We read Matthew, and it makes us itch like we've rolled around in poison ivy. Matthew is talking about how things are when it all breaks down. But its kind of hard stuff so maybe would rather not think about just getting angry being as bad as murder. Or that those sly glances at that boy or that girl may turn out to be devastating sometimes. We already know that divorce is no picnic for anybody. And that last one, that swearing thing, you guys never swear do you? Good. But maybe there's been a promise or two we didn't keep?

It's usually at this point that we pat your sweet little heads and say, 'there, there, it's gonna' be alright. We've made God our _____ who constantly says, 'don't worry, be happy.' It's why, when we get to the hard, raw, unyielding words of Jesus who says, 'you've heard it said... but I tell you. And he even

throws in the "H" word that we get a little squirmy in our seats. Because it's getting a little too personal.

Here's where you need to concentrate. I know it's getting long and you're getting a little bored with all this. Aren't Jesus' words in Matthew saying the same thing as those obey me and it everything will be all right words in Deuteronomy? Murder, anger, adultery, divorce, swearing --- anything sound right or good there? Violence, hatred, slander, prejudice, bigotry, oppression, sexual assault, homophobia, xenophobia, ie. racism, war --- any "good life" there? DO we think, do we believe that God commanded obedience from us because God needs our obedience? Because God somehow just has to have from us our living up to thousands of laws and rules and prescriptions for our living? God doesn't NEED any of that to be God. God WANTS that so that we can live... so that we can be whole and happy and well.'

I know it's hard for you. Them too. Young and Old. We live in a church and in a world that has decided that the very things God seeks from us are like items on the shelf at the grocery store or to be more relevant like things you can buy online. Life is some big Amazon super store. There are all sorts of things we can buy... but none of them, not one, sell what only God can give... life – and the grace we need to live it. Grace that saves in our justification in faith because of Jesus Christ. And grace, discovered in the amazing choice to live for God instead of for myself. TO love God first, then one another....just like Jesus did.

(Turn to congregation) I'll be there in a second and we'll get started. But these guys need to know that God is still at work. God's grace will always be relevant even if talking about God is not so popular. Jesus is still very much around and he expects, yes, expects us to obey and live, so that in his words, we get to live more abundantly.

(Back to pulpit) That took a little longer than I thought. So here's the thing. God calls on us to obey. And we need to say yes.

Here's a poem from Edwina Gately

We are called to say yes
That the kingdom might break through
To renew and to transform
Our dark and groping world.

We stutter and we stammer
To the lone God who calls
And pleads a new Jerusalem
In the bloodied Sinai Straits.

We are called to say yes
That honeysuckle may twine
And twist its smelling leaves
Over the graves of nuclear arms.

We are called to say yes
That black may sing with white
And pledge peace and healing
For the hatred of the past.

We are called to say yes
That nations might gather
and dance one great movement
for the joy of humankind.

We are called to say yes
To a God who still holds fast
To the vision of the Kingdom
For a trembling world of pain.

We are called to say yes
To this God who reaches out

And asks us to share
This amazing dream of love.