



Roanoke, Virginia

February 12, 2023

“The Choice is Yours”

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

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To set the scene, Moses is standing in front of Israel giving a final speech. For a man who complains, as scripture tells us, as being “slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Exodus 4:10), Moses is a gifted orator, who has been delivering speeches/sermons for what amounts to thirty chapters. Don’t worry! My sermon today doesn’t come close to Moses’ long-winded exhortations.

Standing at the edge of Canaan, knowing he will not enter the Promised Land, Moses offers one last appeal, an appeal to the people to remain God’s people. This is not a time for Moses to be subtle or nuanced in his delivery. It is time for stark dichotomies. Moses is direct. Moses is blunt. Moses lays out the only two options for Israel...

We listen with them now as Moses lays out in stark terms the choice that lies before his audience... and let us listen for the Word of God.

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.

I cannot help but read this passage and think of the 1999 movie *The Matrix*.¹ The main character, Thomas Anderson, played by Keanu Reeves, is living two lives: by day he is an average computer programmer, but by night he is a hacker known as Neo. Neo has always questioned his reality, but the truth is far beyond his imagination. Neo is confronted with an opportunity to finally seek out the truth about his perceived reality, and finds himself in a forbidden underworld, seated in front of Morpheus, a legendary computer hacker and rebel warrior, branded as a terrorist by the government.

Morpheus asks Neo, “Do you want to be free?”

“Free from what?” Neo responds.

“The Matrix... Do you want to know what it is?”

Neo swallows and nods his head.

“The Matrix is everywhere, it's all around us... It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.”

“From what truth?”

“That you are a slave, Neo. That you, like everyone else, was born into bondage... kept inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste, or touch. A prison for your mind... But no one can be told what the Matrix is, you have to see it for yourself.”

Morpheus then offers Neo a choice: blue pill or red pill.

“You take the blue pill and the story ends. You wake in your bed and you believe whatever you want to believe.”

“You take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes.”²

¹ Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski. *The Matrix*, 1999.

² Ibid.



Moses, standing at the edge of the Promised Land, offers Israel a choice: blue pill or red pill.

Take the blue pill and go about life living the ignorance of illusion, leaning into whatever may be waiting for you in Canaan.

Or take the red pill and live in the reality of truth, leaning into the God of your ancestors, pushing against the false teachings of the world.

The choice is set before them: life, prosperity, blessings or death, adversity, and curses.

Well, the choice sounds like an easy one, right?

However, the right choice is never the easy choice... the red pill is a hard pill to swallow.

Moses reminds Israel of all they have been through up to this point: enslavement and freedom, their Red Sea escape, the gift of the commandments, and their wilderness wandering.

He reminisces on the peaks and valleys they have encountered as a people, the highs and lows, or as some in the youth ministry world might say, the happy's and crappy's.

What does it mean to choose life, prosperity, and blessings? According to Moses, it means to love God with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. Throughout his sermon, Moses illustrates the good life: forgiving debts, guarding against excessive wealth, defending human dignity, protecting the oppressed, paying employees fairly, offering part of the harvest for those in need.

And as he nears the end of his sermon, the moment becomes holy.

With his own mortality in mind, Moses speaks from a vulnerable space, a holy space knowing that his own death is right around the corner.

There is something beautiful and holy about our last moments with those we love. In these moments we experience something sacred, something extremely difficult and challenging...(pause) and something touching.

I remember receiving the call that my grandfather was nearing his death; I rushed home from summer camp to his bedside. As I entered his room, my dad was crouched down beside the bed holding his hand. Several other family members were there in the room, praying, hugging, crying.

Grandpa was a hardworking man, a brilliant man. But Alzheimer's slowly took that person away. As the family was with him that day, we urged him that he could go, that we love him, and that our family will be fine.

I heard my dad say to Grandpa, "It's ok. You can go. We are here, and we are together."



As difficult as those moments are, they are holy moments. Moments that point us back to the peaks and valleys of life, and then point us forward once more, perhaps with a new appreciation for life and those with whom we share it with... and perhaps they point us forward with a new appreciation for the life God longs for us to know.

Our daily decisions are never labeled “Life” and “Death.” Most decisions do not seem important, but life and death are before us every day. We can choose the life God longs for us... or choose our own sinful death filled ways.

Choose life.

Enjoy the simple things. Play outside. Laugh often and laugh with your whole body. Learn the thing you keep putting off. Think deeply and ask questions deeply. Go dance in the rain. Cry when you feel it is time to cry. Accept others for who they are and forgive them for who they are not. Pursue your passions. Give without wanting acknowledgment. Be patient with others and be patient with yourself. And stop being patient when it is time to tell the truth in love.

Read a book. Write a book. Read poetry. Write a poem. Color, doodle, scribble, make art the way you see it.

Turn off the TV and talk with your family. Go for a walk outside. Spend time alone and in silence. Take deep breaths each morning and continue to breathe deeply throughout the day. Hold someone’s hand and hold it tightly. Let go of something that is not worth your time. Give your time to things you find important. Apologize and forgive. Sit in the grass. Get dirty. Play with your dog. Spend time with people younger than you and lean into their imagination. Spend time with people older than you and lean into their stories.

Invite a stranger to lunch or coffee. Thank someone genuinely. And receive a thank you genuinely when given to you. Figure out what you hope for and live with that hope. Switch “have to” with “get to.”

Come to church. Worship with all your heart. Pray genuinely and pray often. Love your church family. Believe that God loves you. See Christ in the people around you. Take



seriously the baptismal vows you have made as a church today, and those you have made in the past.

Share God's love wherever you go, especially with those who have forgotten it. Praise God, inside and outside of these walls. Live life in joy and allow God to make your life wonderful.

The choice of life or death is not a one-time decision. The choice of life or death is a choice we **get to** make each and every day.

Jesus and his disciples experienced a holy moment in the upper room, a sacred moment. Knowing his death awaited him, Jesus offered one last appeal: love one another, as I have loved you...

And Jesus reminds us still today, "I came for you to have life, to know life, experience life, and to have it abundantly."

The choice is yours...

Choose life.

Amen.

