

Famous last words. Famous last words. I'm going to read out some famous last words, and you tell me who said these words.

Firstly, "Et tu, Brute?" Julius Caesar, start off with an easy one. Next up, "Such is life." Ned Kelly. "Watch this, Dad!" That is anonymous. We'll leave that one anonymous. This is interesting. "Mother, I am stupid." Who said that? It was actually Friedrich Nietzsche. Those are his last words. In sharp contrast, "Thank you." Dallas Willard. Those were his last words as he died of pancreatic cancer over 10 years ago. What about, "This is the end—for me, the beginning of life." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1945. He was killed by the Nazis for his resistance. What about this one, the last one, "Now choose life." Moses.

Now choose life. These were Moses' famous last words. The book of Deuteronomy that we're looking at today is the famous last words of Moses, one of the greatest human beings who's ever lived.

The entire book records his final address to the people of Israel. The nation of Israel stand in Deuteronomy on the very cusp of the promised land, about to enter, but Moses himself will not enter. He will die outside the promised land.

And so the book of Deuteronomy is Moses addressing the new generation, not the Exodus generation, the Numbers wilderness generation, and exhorting them to choose life. The passage that that comes from is in chapter 30 verse 19.

Moses said, This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.

Now choose life, choose life so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God.

Listen to his voice and hold fast to him, for the Lord is your life and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now choose life. Pretty good last words.

Now choose life. I wonder if God was putting that choice to us this morning. Now choose life.

What would we choose? Life, obviously. But what does it mean?

When Moses sets before them this choice, now choose life, what does that mean? How do we choose life? That's our question today.

As we unpack Christ in Deuteronomy, we're unpacking the question of how it is that we might choose life.

## PRAYER

Let me pray for us before we dive in. Heavenly Father, we've brought our needs before you, the needs of our world. We bring our pressing need before you right now that we need to hear from you.

We need your Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to illuminate the words of Scripture, to make them come alive for each of us in all the different places that we've come from. We thank you that you desire to speak to us.

You desire to form us into your image. And so we come now with humility before your word and ask you to speak. I pray that my voice, sick as it is, would not get in the way of anything that you want to do this morning.

Amen.

## WELCOME TO DEUTERONOMY

We are nine sixty-sixths of the way through our Christ in Scripture project.

You're probably aware by now that we are, Lord willing, gonna spend a week in every single book of the Bible, seeing how that book points us to the person of Jesus and his life, death, resurrection and ascension. We've done the gospels in January.

In this month of March, we've been working through the Torah. That is the first five books of the Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers.

And now, Deuteronomy, the last book of the Torah. These are the opening words of the Book of Deuteronomy from Chapter 1 verse 1. These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan.

That is in the Arabah, opposite Suf between Paran and Tofel, Laban, Hazaroth and Dizahab. It takes 11 days to go from Horeb to Kadesh by Neah by the Mount Seir Road.

It's good that I read that and didn't have to get somebody to try with those hard words. Verse 3. In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that Yahweh had commanded him concerning them.

This was after he had defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, and that Edre had defeated Og, king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth.

East of the Jordan, in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law, saying, dot, dot, dot, the Book of Deuteronomy.

So these opening five verses situate the Book of Deuteronomy just on the edge of the promised land, on the other side of the river Jordan. Moses is giving his famous last words before Israel under the leadership of Joshua will take the promised land.

And we're going to look at Christ in Joshua. I think in June, we'll come back to this part of the story. Moses says that this, it's interesting.

It says on the previous slide, it was an 11-day journey from Mount Sinai in the bottom of the Sinai Peninsula up to Kadesh Barnea, which is just south of the promised land.

11 days has become 40 years of wandering, but finally God has told them that it is time, time for the next generation to enter. And so with his last words, Moses presents Israel with a choice.

## COVENANT OVERVIEW

Now the essential background to the choice in Deuteronomy is the idea of the covenant. Covenant is a major theme of the Torah and of the Old Testament as a whole. We haven't really spoken about it in this Torah series.

A covenant is a sworn promise between two parties. I made a covenant to my wife when I married her, standing right here, my dad who was the pastor marrying us, said, will you take this woman to be your wife? And I said, I will.

Do you promise to love her, care for her, cherish her? I said, I do. And then he said, I now pronounce you husband and wife, you may kiss each other.

Marriage, a covenant, swearing, lifelong faithfulness to each other. Every covenant includes at least three things, a decision, an action and an outcome. A decision, an action and an outcome.

Now by this stage of the Hebrew Bible, that is the Old Testament, we have already read Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. And now we're in Deuteronomy. We've already seen a few covenants.

Firstly, the covenant with Noah. Do you remember God promised humanity, but through Noah, that he will never again destroy the earth with a flood. This is the promise of planet.

The second covenant is the Abrahamic covenant. God promises one man in Genesis 12, that he will build a nation, and that nation will have a land to call their own, the promised land.

And then the third covenant that we see in the Old Testament is the Mosaic covenant, the covenant mediated by Moses. We read in Exodus 19.

Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from Mount Sinai and said, this is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob, and what you are to tell the people of Israel.

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagle's wings, and brought you to myself. Now, if you obey me fully, and keep my covenant, then out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together. We will do everything the Lord has said.

So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. The covenant has been made. The people have agreed.

God has initiated. Notice three things about this passage, a decision, an action, and an outcome. There's a very clear decision.

The people say, yes, we will do everything that the Lord requires. There's also action involved in the covenant. God says, if you obey me fully, there's obedience involved.

And then thirdly, there's an outcome. If you obey me fully, you will be my treasured possession. You will be my special nation, although all the nations are mine.

Decision, action, outcome. We see this in all of the covenants. In fact, the Book of Deuteronomy, as a whole, is structured around these three aspects of the covenant, the decision, the action and the outcome.

In chapters one to 11, Moses clearly presents the call to make a decision to commit to God. In 12 to 26 of Deuteronomy, there's a bunch of laws that are the action involved in the covenant.

And then in the final section, 27 to 34, Moses sets before Israel the consequence, the outcome of the covenant, blessings and curse. Deuteronomy as a whole is structured around these three parts.

So for us to choose life, as Moses has told us to do, it means understanding these three parts, the decision, the action and the outcome. Firstly, the covenant requires a decision.

## COVENANT DECISION

Now remember who Moses is talking to. He's not talking to the Exodus generation. He's not talking to the ones who were adults, who saw the ten plagues, who walked through the Red Sea.

He's talking to their children. That means maybe they were children in Egypt. More likely, these are the generation born in the wilderness.

He's speaking to a new generation and exhorting them to make a decision, to decide to commit to Yahweh the way their parents did.

Moses starts Deuteronomy with a recap of the story so far, from what happened when they were at Mount Sinai, chose a bunch of judges, the people rebelled, God was faithful, there was fighting, there was rebellion, they sent the spies, that whole

story, Moses retells it, and then he leads right up to the present moment in order to make the point clear that they have to make a decision. Decide if you will commit to the Lord this day. The centerpiece of this part of Deuteronomy is the Shammatah.

I think I quote the Shammatah every second sermon, which is because it's so important. It's a central part of the Bible.

Moses says, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Impress them on your children, talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road. When you lie down and when you get up, tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. Notice how many different words Moses uses to make the same point. It's like he's got a thesaurus and he's finding all of the synonyms for decide.

He says, hear the commandments, love them, take them to heart, impress them, talk about them, tie them, bind them, write them.

The point is he is compelling the next generation to make a decision, make a decision to God, commit, bind these words on your forehead, write them on the tablet of your heart, make a decision. This is the key point of the first third of Deuteronomy.

Hear, O Israel, Moses says, that word here is the word Shema in Hebrew. That's why we call it the Shema. And here, this word here is not only listen, but listen and respond.

Hear and obey. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Lord in, it's removed the caps, but in your Bible, the first Lord will have all caps.

Whenever you see that, it's Yahweh. That is the name of God. God revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 3 as Yahweh.

Yahweh our God, the Lord is one. Another way of translating the Lord is one is the Lord alone. What that means is out of all the gods that Israel could worship, for them there is one God.

Worship the Lord alone. The Lord is one. Verse five, love the Lord your God.

We talk a lot about love. I think love is not only an emotion, although love gives rise to emotion. It's also not only an action, although love gives rise to action.

Love is something deeper. It is a fundamental orientation of the self to will what is good for another. Now that orientation, when I married my wife Courtney, I decided to love her, committed myself to her.

Now that brings feelings and it brings action, but love is something deeper. It is orienting yourself around the good of another person. Moses says, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Remember, Jesus adds mind to the list in Mark 12. The point is with everything that God has given you, every part of who you are, give it to God. Orient every part of yourself around God.

Moses is compelling the people of Israel to make a decision, to commit to God alone, not multiple gods, one God who is worthy of everything that they have. Make a decision.

I want to ask, have you made that decision to say yes to God, to love him with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength, to orient every part of yourself around God? Have you made that decision?

I think it's fair to say that I'm talking to a room full of mostly yeses. You're in church on a Sunday morning. I think it's likely that you've made a decision to commit to God.

But Moses, he says, love him with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength. We have a situation in the church in the West where we tick Christian on the census. We go to church a certain number of times a month.

We maybe go to Bible study for extra credit. We call ourselves Christians. We say, yes, I believe in Jesus.

But if we were to really do an audit of our heart, soul, mind and strength, we might end up saying I'm half-hearted, quarter-minded, one-third sold in my orientation around God.

It's easy to say yes to God, but to not have the kind of all in worship that Moses is commanding and compelling Israel to have. Do you remember when Jesus invited his first followers? He said, come follow me.

Do you know what they did? They dropped their nets, left their father and their family and followed him. They were all in.

They made the decision. There was no turning back for those disciples. That's the calling on us to make the decision, to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength.

I grew up in one church from when I was born until I was 14. Then we finished up at that church and we went to another church at night church once. We were sitting at the back row of the church.

I was 14 years old. In the providence of God, that was the night when the teenagers had just returned from youth camp. There's a bunch of teenagers my age, 14 and a little bit older, sharing stories from youth camp.

They were crying and they were telling all these incredible stories of the love of God that they had found and what God had said to them and done in them. And I'm sitting in the back row like, what is going on?

It's not that people in my church context weren't passionate in the same way, but I didn't know that a teenager could be like that for God. I was a Christian. I'm a pastor's kid.

I always called myself a Christian, but I didn't know that that was an option. That kind of whole-hearted, whole-souled, whole-minded, whole-bodied love for God.

God used that moment when I was 14 to take me on a journey that brought me to where I am today. I was baptized a couple of months after that moment here in Hornsby Baptist.

Around that time, God called me to ministry, and that pathway has led to where I am now. I realized when I was 14 that I was half-hearted, maybe three-quarter-minded, quarter-souled.

It's a tricky question, I think, to really do an audit on how much of your heart, soul, mind, and strength you have given to God. But Moses compels us to make the decision. It's all or nothing.

It's everything given to God in grateful worship and love. Moses says, choose life, make a decision.

## COVENANT ACTION

The covenant requires a decision, and it involves specific action. The second section of Deuteronomy, chapters 12 to 26, is the laws and decrees of the covenant. These are the actions that the covenant involves.

So Israel have made a decision, we will commit to God. Great, this is what that looks like.

In Deuteronomy 12 verse 1, Moses says, these are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess as long as you live in the land. What follows is 15 chapters of law.

These chapters are actually where the Book of Deuteronomy gets its name. The word Deuteronomy is an English word which comes from two Greek words, *juteros* and *nomos*, second law. Deuteronomy is the second law.

Because of this section, now most of the commands are re-statements of commands from Leviticus. Just saying the same thing again. But there's a few new commands.

The point is that Moses is packaging up again, for a second time, the action that the Covenant involves and putting that before the people of Israel. Do you remember there's 613 commands in the Torah, 365 positive commands, 248 negative commands.

Moses puts that before Israel. 613 commands. Now, we don't have time or frankly desire to go through all 613.

Thankfully, Moses has given us the condensed version, and that is the 10 Commandments. The 10 Commandments are first found in Exodus 20, and then they're repeated in Deuteronomy Chapter 5.

Before I read some of them out, the crucial thing to know about the 10 Commandments is that they're not called the 10 Commandments. At least, they never were until 600 years ago.

John Wycliffe, in the late 1300s, translated the Hebrew Bible, or the Hebrew and Greek Bible, into English for the first time, and he translated a couple of Hebrew words into 10 Commandments.

And so for 600 years, we've called them the 10 Commandments. In Hebrew and Greek, it's called the 10 Words, not the 10 Commandments, the 10 Words, the Decalogue, the Decalogos. And you might think, who cares?

Words, Commandments, you'll see why it's important. Deuteronomy 5 verse 5. Moses says, at that time, I stood between the Lord and you to declare to you the word of the Lord because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain.

The Lord said, here are the 10 words, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Now, number one, you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or in the earth beneath or in the waters below and so on. The 10 commandments. But notice how the 10 commandments start.

What's the first, like the zero word? I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery. It's almost like there's an invisible therefore.

Therefore have no other gods before me. Therefore don't make for yourself an idol. What I'm saying is that the 10 commandments, which are a summary of the entire law, are a response to God's gracious salvation, not the reason for his salvation.

The order of logic is so important to get right, that God doesn't tell Israel what they must do, and then once they do it, he saves them.

He saves them first and says, Therefore, because I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery, have no other God before me. We must keep the order of those two things right.

I wonder, in the morning when you wake up, when your mind turns to God, what is the first thing that you hear or you would imagine you hear him saying? What's the first thing God says to you in the morning? Is it, thou shalt not...

a command? Or is the first word you hear from God, I am your father and you are my beloved son or daughter? With you I am well pleased.

Our answer to which one we hear first is gonna be very shaped by our family of origin, our parents, the words that they spoke to us. But the Bible is so clear that God's first word is grace. It's not command.

He is the God who saves his people out of slavery in Egypt. And then he calls for a response. Grace is our father's first word every day.

The action of the covenant, the laws and the life that we're called to live is a response to what he has done for us. It's not the reason why he saves us.

We respond to his grace by being wholehearted, whole-minded, whole-souled, and whole-bodied in our love for him. Because he starts every day with grace.

## COVENANT OUTCOME

The covenant requires a decision. And it involves specific action that results in an outcome. The third and final section of Deuteronomy, chapters 27 to 34, spell out the consequence of the decision.

Moses says, choose life. You can go this way, this is what's going to happen. Or you go this way, and this is what's going to happen.

Blessings and curses. Now what is really cool about this part of Deuteronomy is, Moses wants to drive home this point so strongly, that if you choose God, it means blessing. And if you don't, it means the other thing.

He wants to drive it home so much that he gives them an embodied action to perform. So in the Promised Land, there are two mountains just on the other side of the river, Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.

Now God says, Moses says to the people, half of you are to go on Mount Gerizim and pronounce blessing, and the other half go to Mount Ebal and pronounce the curse.

So you get this stereo, stereo means two ears, like in music, a stereo picture of the consequence of the Covenant. So we're going to do what Moses said.

I'm going to stand on this side, and I'll read to you guys, you've fortunately sat on this side of the room, the blessing, and then I'll read something else to you. I'm going to see if we can make, there we go, the speaker's coming out here.

Deuteronomy 28. If you obey the Lord your God, and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.

All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God. You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock.

The calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your needful trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

And then the other half of Israel were on the other mountain, and they read these words. I'm sorry, this part of the room will be empty next week. Deuteronomy 28 15.

However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I'm giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you. You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.

Your basket and your needful trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed and the crops of your land and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.

And he goes on and on and on and on. He says way more on the curse side than on the blessing side. That's pretty heavy.

But this is the outcome of the covenant. Blessing if you choose life, if you choose faithfulness to God, and curse if you turn your back on the God who is life. This is the choice that Moses puts before Israel.

These are his famous last words. Now choose life. That's how he finishes.

Choose life. Choose the blessing.

## COVENANT FAILURE

Except Moses knows that they won't. In Chapter 31, after Moses finished writing in a book, The Words of this Law from Beginning to End, he gave this command to the Levites, who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord.

Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God. There it will remain a witness against you. For I know, Moses knows, how rebellious and stiff-necked you are.

If you've been rebellious against the Lord while I'm still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die?

Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing, and call the heavens and the earth to testify against them.

For I know, I know, that after my death, you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you.

In days to come, disaster will fall on you because you will do evil on the side of the Lord and arouse his anger by what your hands have made. With his last words, Moses tells Israel to choose life, but he knows that they will not choose life.

He is pessimistic. That's how Deuteronomy ends. In fact, that's how the Torah ends.

Yes, Moses is hopeful that God will do a future work, but he ends by saying, you won't choose life. All these blessings, you're not going to choose them. You're going to choose faithlessness.

You're going to turn from God and all the curses of the covenant will come on you. That's how the Torah ends. Israel won't keep the Covenant and they don't.

You turn to Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the rest of the Old Testament is the sad story of the people turning from God and walking this way. Again, I'm sorry that this side of the room, seriously, sit on this side next time.

It's a sad story, but it points us to a person. The Torah ends with this sad image that Israel will not choose life. By the end of the Torah, there's all these major plot points that are set.

All of the big plot points of the Bible are set by the end of the Torah. So when will the serpent crusher come? Do you remember Genesis 3.15?

When will he come? How is Abraham's family going to bring blessing to the world? How can a holy God be reconciled with unholy people?

How can God transform the hearts of his people? How will the people of God escape the curse and receive the blessing? By the end of the Torah, all of these major plot points of the entire Bible are set.

They're ready to go, awaiting fulfilment. That's how the Torah ends. The Book of Moses ends like that.

## CHRIST IN DEUTERONOMY

Now, this sermon isn't Moses in Deuteronomy, it's Christ in Deuteronomy. As Virginia said, today is Palm Sunday, the day when we celebrate Jesus entering Jerusalem as king. He went to the temple courts and began to teach there.

I won't tell you the rest of what happened this week because Good Friday is coming. But I think it's interesting this year that we have approached Easter from the Torah. I've never done that, never seen that done before.

We are coming this year to the death and resurrection of Jesus in the light of the first five books of the Bible, which sheds such an incredible light on what Jesus did on the cross. The Torah really frames it in an interesting way.

Christ in Genesis, the serpent struck Jesus' heel in death, but he crushed Satan's head on the cross. Christ in Exodus, Jesus is the lamb of God whose blood cleanses us and delivers us from death.

Christ in Leviticus, Jesus is both priest and sacrifice who makes atonement to make us holy so we can live with a holy God.

Christ in Numbers, as Moses lifted up the snake, so the son of man was lifted up on the cross that all who look to him might have life. But what about Christ in Deuteronomy? How do we see Jesus fulfil this last book of the Torah?

Moses went up on a mountain and he said now choose life. Receive the blessing. Jesus went up on a mountain and chose death.

He took the curse of sin on himself. He did the opposite of what Moses says. He chose death.

He took the curse on himself. Paul says in Galatians 3, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Lord by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.

Christ redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to all people, to the Gentiles, through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Christ in Deuteronomy is the one who took the curse of sin on himself that we might receive the blessing of God. He became sin on the cross to take away our sin, so that we might receive the favour and the blessing of God.

And so now for anyone who trusts in him, blessing is all you get. Yes, hallelujah. Yes, sin has consequences.

We live in a world where sin breaks things, but the blessing of God comes to those who are covered by the blood of Christ Jesus.

This is Christ in Deuteronomy, the one who took the curse that we might get the blessing, and even more than that, that we might get the promise of the Holy Spirit who transforms our heart, transforms us from the inside out in order that we might

love God with all of our heart and all of our soul and all of our mind and all of our strength. This is the new covenant. The old covenant is obsolete. That's what Hebrew says.

It's done. There is a better covenant that Christ is mediator of. And it is a covenant where you just receive all the blessing and none of the curse because he took all the curse.

The outcome of the new covenant has been secured. Eternal life is available for all who will trust Jesus. God stands ready to bless you this morning because the curse of sin has been taken away.

The action of the covenant is not what secures the outcome, but it is in response to the outcome. The grace that God pours out teaches us to live differently and to walk in faithfulness to him. And so what stands before you now is the decision.

Choose life because Christ has done away with death and the curse of sin. So choose life, trust in him, trust in the Lord. I finished up as youth pastor a couple of weeks ago.

I've been a youth leader for seven years, and over that time have given probably over a hundred talks to teenagers. And so it was interesting two weeks ago to think about my last words. They're not famous, but they're last words.

What's the final thing that I would want to leave with these teenagers that I've walked with for seven years? Some of them I've known from year six, and they're growing all the way up. Now choose life is a pretty good way to finish.

I preached on Romans 12 too, because that's what Tristan told me to preach on. Also a great passage. But if I could have chosen, I think I would have said now choose life.

Jesus has done everything required for you to receive the blessing of eternal life with God. The curse of sin is done. So choose life.

Those would be my famous last words. Those are Moses' famous last words. May that be our response, that we as a church and as individuals choose life, because the Lord has given it to us in Christ.

Let's give him thanks now in worship after I pray. Lord, we thank you for your faithfulness as we now come to the end of a five-week series in the Torah. We thank you that you know the end from the beginning.

We thank you that you always had a solution ready for our rebellion. You know our hearts better than we do, but you've done everything required.

And so we stand or sit here today grateful that Lord Jesus, you took the curse of sin on yourself, that we might receive the blessing. So teach us, Lord, what it is to choose life, to say yes to your invitation.

Help us now to love you with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength. Receive our grateful praise, because we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.