

“Looking Good”

Saying good-bye can be hard. After we left our oldest child at college for the first time my wife cried for thirty minutes of the drive home. I would like you to believe I was simply stronger than her – but the truth is, I was driving and by necessity all the grief was in my chest not my tear ducts.

What we call the book of Deuteronomy is **Moses' farewell speech** as he is about to send those who have counted on him into the promised land – *without him*. Which was sort of like sending them off to college, the military, trade school or a new job: new territory, new people, new opportunities, new danger. There is a great deal of trepidation and concern.

Our text today contains the final moments of all the advice and warnings Moses wants to give those who have been in his charge who are now about to go on without him. **They are on the border between where they have come from and where they are going.** Know anybody like that? I believe you do.

The children of Israel, not unlike our children when we send them off from home, want to be **successful and look good**. They want to not only thrive but also pass down this new land for generations. Moses warns them that finding satisfaction in living it will not be about “*looking good*” but about **looking to the good of God** which will make life work.

It sounds so clear, doesn't it? Today I set before *you life and prosperity, death, and adversity – choose life*. Why would anyone avoid life and choose death *intentionally*? And yet we know the children of Israel struggled with these choices after entering the promised land. We know we struggle with these choices because *things are not always as they appear*.

How do we choose the good? How do we avoid having our own choices and ways of being cripple us in life? Moses says today it is by **“loving the Lord your God and walking in God's ways**. The heart of the matter is love - *love the Lord your God*. Everything else grows from love.

How we live and the choices we make matter. And making good choices is *a matter of the heart*. Love the Lord your God with all your heart.

That sounds right, yet we struggle to embody this. Our text today wants us to examine our choices with the questions, ***“Do they bring life?” “Are they rooted in love for God?”*** When our choices get set on auto pilot we are in trouble if it is *only habit* and not *habit rooted in life giving practices from God*.

Yes – God’s great love for us is a gift through Jesus. There is no gift better. In truth, gifts of grace from God bring *opportunity*. Making the most of opportunity means we engage with and work to develop it. We can be given innate artistic talent – but it remains hidden unless we develop it. We can possess amazing innate intelligence – ***but without some developing of that gift it doesn’t really do us any good.***

The Children of Israel are leaving the past behind to move into the promised land. They will carry what they have experienced in the past, of course, but now is the time ***to stretch, work and discover what God has for them*** in the new place – not simply yearn for the old.

Friends, you are about to have a new settled pastor. I could not be happier for you. ***God’s grace is taking you somewhere new where you will find divine opportunity with which you will creatively and faithfully work.*** My work here is coming to a close – as it was meant to from the beginning. But we won’t know if I helped you in the way you needed for two or three years. The test of my time with you is not the time itself – but your thriving together with your new settled pastor.

I know it doesn’t sound very noble, but I ask you today, ***“Please make me look good.”*** Please go into the time ahead with your new pastor knowing you are entering the promised land: *Certain it is where you should be* – willing to try new things and *working to develop* the opportunities God has for you in the days ahead.

Of course, in the end, *God’s faithfulness* is the good to which we look for direction rather than worry about how we look. So, let’s all do that – forever and for always let us ***look to the good things of God*** and work in tandem with them. Let’s remember that *looking to God’s good fulfills and renews our lives in a way that simply looking good never can.* Let’s accept Moses’ encouragement to faithful living in love as we enter the promised land.