Rock Valley Bible Church (www.rvbc.cc)

2006-010

March 5, 2006 by Steve Brandon

What Is Your Final Answer?

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

1. The Two Witnesses
2. The Two Options
3. The Correct Answer

In the fall of 1999, a game show began to be aired here in America entitled, "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." I'm sure that many of you have seen the show. I have actually watched it only a few times. But, each time that I have watched it, I have enjoyed it very much.

Contestants sit in what they call, "the hot seat," and answer a series of questions. Each of these question are a multiple choice question. Four possibilities are show on the screen and the contestant will choose one of the four options. Should the question be answered correctly, the contestant continues on to the next round. These questions increase in difficulty as they continue on. They also increase in value as well. The first question is worth $100, should the contestant answer the question correctly. The next question is worth $200. The fifteenth question is worth $1,000,000, should the contestant answer correctly. However, if the contestant fails to any question along the way, the game stops and the contestant goes home empty.

The mood of the game is very serious, which could easily be expected. after all, a million dollars is at stake! The music that is played is deep and suspenseful music. This game is played in a dark room. During the asking and answering of the question, spotlights are focused upon the contestant and the host of the show.

In the few times that I have watched this television show, one thing always stands out. As the contestant hears the question, he begins to think out loud and talk about each of the possible correct answers. "I know that the answer cannot be 'A'." I'm pretty sure that the answer isn't 'C' either." So, for me, it's a choice between 'B' or 'D'. Um, ... I'm going with 'B'. I think that 'B' is the answer. Let's go with 'B'."

And then the host of the show usually says something like, "Is that your final answer?" To which the contestant will affirm, "Yes. 'B' is my final answer."

It's then that the host of the show will ask "the computer" is the final answer 'B'?" If the answer is chosen correctly, music begins to play and spotlights being to shine and dance around the room in celebration that the question was answered correctly. The audience will begin to clap in celebration of a correct answer. The contestant will breathe a sigh of relief. The host will usually compliment the contestant on a job well done.

As things calm down a bit, the music brings focus once again upon the two people sitting on the stage. The lights in the audience dim. Once again, the spotlights are on the two people on the stage. All is serious again as everyone prepares for the next question.

This morning, as we continue in our exposition through the entire Bible, we come to the last half of the book of Deuteronomy. As this book comes to a close, Moses is like the host of "Who Wants to be A Millionaire," asking Israel, "What is your final answer?" The final question is simply this: "How will you choose to live?" Moses gives them two options: (1) "You may live in obedience to the LORD, submitting yourself in faith to the words that He has commanded you, or (2) You may live in rebellion against the LORD, refusing His counsel and following in your own paths." With great seriousness, Moses will ask the people, "What is your final answer? How will you choose to live?" But, unlike the host of "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," Moses gives them the correct answer. He tells them how they ought to live.

I invite you to open your Bibles to Deuteronomy 30. I have chosen verses 19 and 20 of this chapter as the verses to help open up to us the text that we have before us. As I read these verses for you, please notice the serious tone of the question, the options that were placed before Israel, as well as the answer that Moses gives to them.

> Deuteronomy 30:19-20
> Moses says, ... "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for

> this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

These are solemn words that Moses speaks to the people. They ought not to be taken lightly. This fact can be seen in the first phrase of our text: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today." My first point is simply called ...

1. The Two Witnesses

As Moses calls these two witnesses, "heaven and earth," the effect is to alert the people as to the seriousness of the words that he is speaking to them. It's not so much that "heaven and earth" are to take the witness stand in the court and testify against the people of Israel, because Israel has yet to make their final choice. Rather, it's that "heaven and earth" are to be observers to what Moses is saying to the people of Israel so that they will stand ready to give testimony at any time of the clear choice that Moses placed before the people of Israel. Should Israel choose to go the wrong way, heaven above and earth below will be able to speak against the people of Israel.

They are like witnesses who stand up for a wedding ceremony. They have heard the vows that the bride and groom have made to each other. At any point in the future, should there be any question as to the vows that these two people made to each other, the witnesses would be able to stand up and say, "I heard this man say with his own mouth, that he would take this woman as his lawfully wedded wife, live together with her in holy matrimony, love, honor, and comfort her, keep her in sickness and in health, forsake all others and keep only unto her, as long as they both would live. Furthermore, I heard this woman repeat similar vows to her husband." Therefore, the divorce that they are now considering is a forsaking of his previously made vow, "in the presence of God and in the presence of other witnesses."

As Moses gave this final choice to the people, heaven and earth would be able to rise up some day in the day that the people of Israel departed from the LORD, and say, "I was there to witness the final choice that Moses laid before the people of Israel. He made their choice about as clear to them as it could be made. They heard of their options. They knew that they had either a choice to love the LORD or to forsake Him. They knew of the consequence of their choices. As they have chosen to disobey the LORD, surely, the painful consequences that they are now experiencing is entirely just. They have no reason to complain the harsh judgement

of the LORD that has come upon them. Moses made it as clear to them as he was able. The people clearly understood. They have forsaken the LORD and are merely reaping the consequences of their actions."

When Moses talks about "heaven and earth" witnessing, he is simply calling the most general spheres of the creation of God to witness against these people. The heavens speak. Psalm 19:1 says that "the heavens are telling of the glory of God." The earth speaks. When Cain killed his brother Abel, the blood of Abel cried out to the LORD from the ground (Gen. 4:10). And so, the heavens and the earth are able to witness against those who fail to submit themselves to the LORD's rule and reign.

The solemnity of things come to us as well. We aren't playing games here at Rock Valley Bible Church. The things that we are engaged in here are the most serious of matters that you will ever encounter in your lives. We are dealing here with matters of life and death. Yes, your difficulties at work are important. Yes, your mother's health is important. Yes, your children's grades in school are important. Yes, your neighbor's surgery is important. But, far more important than all of these things are the states of your souls. And the state of your souls is determined by how you deal with the life of Jesus Christ.

Do you recognized Jesus Christ as Lord of the universe? Have bowed your knee to Him? Have you found in Him the righteousness that you most desperately need? The Scripture clearly declares that we deserve to die for our sins (Rom. 6:23). But the good news is that Jesus Christ offered up Himself as a sacrifice for sin. We simply need to believe in Him and our sins are wiped away. By faith, we can see the death sentence upon our souls removed. We can live eternally with Him forever. These things are a matter of life and death, which we can see in our next point, ...

2. The Two Options

Moses set before the Israelites a clear choice between the two ways of life. He said, "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse." It was a choice between life and death. It was a choice between blessing and curse.

These two choices have been the theme of the previous four chapters in the book of Deuteronomy. Time and time again, Moses was explaining to them of the two options that they had. They could obey and live and obtain blessing! They could disobey and die and be cursed. Many times, and in many different ways, Moses

laid these two options before the people in these four chapters. Indeed, the words of Moses here at the end of chapter 30 are really like a brief summery of all that Moses had been saying since the end of chapter 27. It has all been building to this. It all comes to a head. So, let's spend a bit of time examining Deuteronomy 27-30.

> Deuteronomy 27:11-13
> Moses ... charged the people on that day, saying, ..."When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. For the curse, these shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali."

In verse 14, we see that the Levites were to say these things with a loud voice for all the people to hear. To get the idea of what is happening here, you need to know a bit of geography and topology of the land of Israel. When Israel came to conquer the promised land, they attacked from the east to the west in the middle of the land and split it into two territories. Once the land was split in two, Israel conquered the land in the south. Then, they continued on to attack the north. Until, finally, they conquered the entire territory. (In Joshua 10, you can read about how the Israelites conquered the southern portion of the land. In Joshua 11, you can read about how the Israelites conquered the northern portion of the land.)

Right in the middle of the land, near the city of Shechem, there are two hills with a valley that runs between them. The valley is about 500 yards wide and runs for a couple of miles. On each side of this valley, there are two hills that extend about 1000 feet above the valley of Shechem. On the southern side is Mount Gerizim. On the northern side is Mount Ebal. When the people entered the land, they were to act out this divine drama as a giant object lesson for all to see and remember. Half of the tribes were to ascend mount Ebal (on the north). Half of the tribes were to ascend mount Gerizim (on the south). In so doing, the entire valley would become a giant theatre. So that all might see and understand what was going on in the valley below. Once all were assembled in their seats, the reading of the law was to begin. As it was read, the people on the hillsides were to affirm it. This is exactly what happened a few years later. We read about it in Joshua 8.

> Joshua 8:33-35
> All Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as the native. Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had given command at first

to bless the people of Israel. Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them.

So important were these things to communicate with the people of Israel that Moses wanted this object lesson to take place. There is a way that a physical activity can help learn the lesson that is being taught. It would be helpful for us this morning to attempt to reenact this for a bit. Suppose that we transform our auditorium into the valley of Shechem. The valley is right in the middle and the mounds are on each side. Those on the south represent the blessing. Those on the north represent the curses. As I read the curses that Levites would have read before all the people, I want for you to cry out, "Amen" when appropriate.

Deuteronomy 27:15-26
"Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret " And all the people shall answer and say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother." And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who moves his neighbor's boundary mark." And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who misleads a blind person on the road." And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow." And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's skirt." And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who lies with any animal." And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or of his mother." And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who lies with his mother-in-law." And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who strikes his neighbor in secret." And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person."

And all the people shall say, "Amen."
"Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them." And all the people shall say, "Amen."

At this point, I believe that Joshua continued to read on into chapter 28, which contain the wonderful blessings that would accompany the people if they obeyed the LORD.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14
Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God:
Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.
Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.
Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.
Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.
The LORD shall cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways.
The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you.
The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will be afraid of you.
The LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.
The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.
The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I charge you today, to

> observe them carefully, and do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them."

These are incredible blessings that would come upon the people of God if they would simply obey His voice. Verse 15 begins again with some curses that would come upon the people if they disobeyed the LORD, "But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you." Beginning in verse 16, we see some curses that would come upon the people of Israel if they refused to keep the commands of God. They continue on for 53 verses! Let me give you only a flavor of what God tells the people would take place if they continue to forsake the LORD.

Their city would be cursed (verse 16). Their kitchens would be cursed (verse 17). Their children would be cursed (verse 18). Their gardens would be cursed (verse 18). Their livestock would be cursed (verse 18). Their travel would be cursed (verse 19). Pestilence would come upon them (verse 21). Consumption, fever, and inflammation would come upon them (verse 22). Overbearing heat would overtake the land (verse 23). Their enemies would defeat them (verse 25). Their dead bodies would be food for birds and beasts (verse 26). They would be afflicted with boils and tumors, like those sent to strike the Egyptians (verse 27). They would have the dreaded "itch" (verse 27). They would be confused (verse 28). They would be oppressed and robbed (verse 29). Their wives would be violated by other men (verse 30). They would plant, but not be able to eat (verse 30). They would slaughter their ox, but not be able to eat from it (verse 31). They would watch their sons and daughters be taken away from them into slavery (verse 32).

Things would be so bad that verse 37 says, "You shall become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the people where the LORD drives you." In other words, you will be the laughing stock of nations. They will tell jokes about you. I remember growing up hearing and telling ethnic jokes about the Polish people. As my father heard me say some of these jokes, he attempted to direct me in a better direction. The Brandon family is from Norway. So, my father told me to tell jokes about myself. It is always better to laugh at yourself, rather than at others. And so, as a little boy, I liked to go around telling Norwegian jokes.

In the same way, the people of Israel would become a joke and ridicule among the nations. One might easily ask, "How did the Ammorites conquer Israel so fast?" The answer would come, "They marched in backwards and the Israelite thought

they were leaving." Another might ask, "How do you sink an Israelite war ship?" The answer would be that "you put it in water." Perhaps the other nations would joke about how easily you could defeat the Israelites by simply throwing Coriander seed at them. They would run away, as it reminds them of the Manna that they ate in the wilderness.

These are the types of things that would come upon the Israelites if they would continue in their rebellion against the LORD. From verses 38-68, we hear of more curses that might come upon the Israelites if they continue in their rebellion. We could go on and on describing what terrible things might easily come upon them.

In chapter 29, we see another appeal to the Israelites. Moses gathered the people of Israel together in the land of Moab (verse 1). He reminded them of all the wonderful ways in which the LORD had blessed Israel. Consider verses 5 and 6, "I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot. You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or strong drink, in order that you might know that I am the LORD your God."

For forty years, their clothes didn't wear out. For forty years, their sandals didn't wear out. For forty years, God sustained them daily with Manna. For forty years, God provided water for them when they needed it. It was obvious that the LORD was sustaining the Israelites in the wilderness. Their final answer should have been easy. That's the conclusion given in verse 9, "So keep the words of this covenant to do them, that you may prosper in all that you do."

But should it come about that these people forsake the LORD and these curses come upon them, then the nations will say "Why has the LORD done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?" (verse 24). The obvious conclusion then, comes in verses 25-28.

> Deuteronomy 29:25-28
> Because they forsook, the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.

Moses placed before these people two options: a blessing and a curse. This is what chapters 27, 28, and 29 of Deuteronomy are all about. The LORD described the greatness of the blessing, should the people obey. He also described the greatness of the curse, should the people disobey. The options have been established. Look at chapter 30, verse 15, "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity." If you obey, there will be life and prosperity (verse 16). If you disobey, there will be death and adversity (verses 17-18). The choice is yours.

The path of life is the path that forsakes all and follows Jesus Christ, the Lord. Jesus said it this way, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24-25). Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Indeed, "There is no other name under haven that has been given among men by which we must be saved," but the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

There is a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon in which Calvin is sitting at what looks like a lemonade stand. Rather than selling lemonade, he is selling "life." The stand says, "Life, 5". Calvin's friend, Suzy, comes up to Calvin with a nickel in her hand and asks Calvin, "All right, here's a nickel. What do I get?" Calvin then replies, "Nothing. I just ripped you off." Astonished, Suzy cries out, "What?!" And then Calvin comes with the punch line, "That's life!" Unlike Calvin, Jesus offers real life! He said, "I am the bread of life that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51).

Are you following the path of life and blessing, which is the path of faith in Christ? Or, are you following the path of death and cursing, which neglects Jesus Christ? What is your final answer?

3. The Correct Answer

Look now once again to the end of chapter 30. In verse 19 we read, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. ... So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants." With these words, Moses is showing that he is no impartial reporter of the news. He isn't merely reporting the facts. He isn't Regis Philbin saying, "What's your final answer?" Rather, he is a passionate preacher, who wants the best for his loved nation. He has a burning desire in his soul for the welfare of

the Israelites. He tells them what their final answer should be. He says, "Choose life." He then goes on to tell them of the great benefits that such a choice will be to them. "You and your descendants" will live if you make this choice!

In these ways, Moses is much like a father, instructing his children on the way that is good for them. Which of you parents don't want the best for your children? Not a single one of you. There are times when you place certain restrictions upon your children. There are times when you instruct them of certain things that they need to do. It is all for their good. The good father will take his son upon his lap and say, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Prov. 1:10). "My son, ... do not enter the path of the wicked and do not proceed in the way of evil men" (Prov. 4:14). "My son, the one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it" (Pro. 6:32). All of these things are for the good of his son. And so also, as Moses pleaded with the people to "choose life" he was seeking their welfare! He was seeking their good!

The question might easily arise, ... "How exactly are they to choose life?" Were they supposed to sit on the hot seat, under the shining spotlights and answer the question by saying, "I choose life. Life is my final answer!"? Obviously, that's not what they were supposed to do. In verse 20 Moses gives them three ways in which they were to choose life. He said, "by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him." There are three ways in which you choose life: (1) through love; (2) through obedience; and (3) through dependence.

(1) Loving God speaks of our affections. It speaks about what stirs inside our souls. It speaks about the passions of our hearts. It speaks about where we find our joy and fulfillment. It speaks about what thrills our heart!

(2) Obeying God speaks about our trust. There are many times in this life when a battle rages in our soul. There are things that God is calling us to do. But, there are other things that we want to do in the flesh. When you love the LORD, you will obey the LORD and not your flesh.

(3) The key to obedience is dependence. Moses said that the Israelites were to "hold fast" to the LORD. Literally, the idea is that we would be "glued" to Him. We won't let Him go. The obedient man is dependent upon the LORD for all things. He is the one who clings to God and His word. Later in Deuteronomy, Moses would tell the people, "Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today. ... For it is not an idle word for you; indeed, it is your life." Such is a dependent attitude toward God.

Should the truth be known, we are dependent upon the LORD for all things. Consider the following verses:

> Deuteronomy 29:2-4
> You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land; the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear.

To be sure, the people of Israel were obstinate and rebellious because of their own sin and their own choice. They were entirely responsible for their rebellion. And yet, a greater reality was at work. The LORD had not transformed their hearts to believe. It is the LORD who stirs the heart and illumines the eyes and opens the ears. It's only when God opens the eyes to see the glories of Christ that true spiritual life is imparted (see 2 Cor. 4:4).

In Deut. 30:6, Moses is describing the day when Israel would return to the LORD. He said, "The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live." How we need the working of the spirit of God upon our lives! If your life is not headed in the right direction, cry out to the LORD and plead for His gracious hand to "circumcise your heart" so that you might love Him with all your might. The only place where our hope is found is in the working of God to turn our stony hearts into soft hearts that long to love Him.

There is blessing in believing and obeying. Moses can't give a command without a promised blessing. In the last phrase in verse 20, we read, "For this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD sword to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them." Here it again (as if for the first time). The reason why Moses told the Israelites to choose life was for their own good! They would live long! They would live in the land! They would experience the blessing of God's initial promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As I bring my message to a close this morning, I simply ask you, "What is your final answer?" Will you follow the Lord Jesus Christ? Or will you follow your own plans for your own life. If you have not come to the place where you have made a firm pledge in your hearts to follow the Lord fully, I exhort you now to make such a decision to follow Christ. A well-known hymn is often sung in Christian circles, which says, ...

I have decided to follow Jesus,
I have decided to follow Jesus,
I have decided to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me,
No turning back, no turning back.

Tho' none go with me, still I will follow,
Tho' none go with me, still I will follow,
Tho' none go with me, still I will follow,
No turning back, no turning back.

Can you sing that song with your whole heart?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 5, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.