

“Choose the way of life!” Deuteronomy 30:15-20

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Today our dear Father has given for our meditations this wonderful and comforting passage from the book of Deuteronomy. This passage is often called, – the two ways, the way of life and the way of death.

Have you thought that this idea of two ways, the way of life and the way of death is present everywhere in the Bible? From the very beginning till the very end. Maybe it is not always expressed exactly in these words, but the idea about either ... or ... is found everywhere.

The two ways were set before Adam. The two ways were set before the Israel as we read today. The two ways Jesus sets before His followers in the Sermon on the Mount. “Enter through the narrow gate!”

And the two ways are described when Bible talks about the end of times and the coming of God in His glory. “Sheep on the right, and goats on the left.” Notice, – there is no third group. It is either... or... .

This is what we’ll do today. We will try to understand what is this way of life and what is this way of death. And, finally, what are we as Christians supposed to do. The way of life, the way of death and what are we to do.

First, let’s look at the way of life. Let’s begin in the very beginning, looking at Genesis 2 and 3. What did God Yahweh (this is the name by which true God revealed Himself in the Old Testament times), what did He say to Adam?

“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen 2:16-17)

Let's see what is going on here. Where was Adam? In the garden of Eden. He was with His Creator, in the presence of the holy God, who Himself is the very source of life.

And what did God Yahweh say? "Adam, everything that I have created is yours, all the blessings of my wonderful creation are yours, have them and enjoy them, just trust me and listen to me, because if you won't, you will surely die."

You see, this is important! This is how we can understand well what was going on. What was Yahweh doing? He said to Adam: "As long, as you keep listening to me, to my Word, you will have life and all the blessings on earth".

"But if you will not listen to me, then you will surely die." And what did the serpent do a few verses later, Genesis 3? The serpent tried to persuade Adam and Eve that they don't need to listen to what God says.

The serpent tried to persuade them that they will be better off if they won't listen to the Word of God. That, surely, they will not die, but that instead, – they will be like gods themselves.

God the Creator is the very sources of life. And as long, as we stay with Him, as long, as we keep listening to His Word, we will live. He has life in Himself and He shares this life with those who listen to Him.

Remember, when He speaks, His Word always goes together with ..., yes, with the Holy Spirit. And what does the Holy Spirit do? What do we say in the Nicene Creed?

"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Giver of ... yes, the Giver of life." This is what the Holy Spirit does, when we listen to God. Gives us life.

Besides, as long, as you stay with true God and keep listening to Him, He gives you abundantly His blessings, many of which you can enjoy and celebrate already today, as we do, and much more will be given when this age is over.

This is also how the way of life is described in our today's passage. "If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God ... by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments... then ... the LORD your God will bless you ..."

The way of life is the way together with the One, who Himself is life. The way of life is listening to Jesus and obeying His Commandments, which leads to – enjoying God's blessings.

The same way it is described in the New Testament. Jesus says that He has life in Himself (John 5:26). And: "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:7)

We sometimes get distracted from what is truly important. Thus, even Christians may think that Christian faith is about God's blessings, – fellowship, forgiveness, wisdom, support, good conscience, rest and peace, and so on.

These all are wonderful gifts of our loving God, but Christian faith is about much more. It is about life. About true life. About life in its deepest and truest sense. About life that will never end.

This is what Jesus says to you: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26)

Now we will look at the way of death. This one also is described in a very simple way. “But if your heart turns away, and you will not listen, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them ... you shall surely perish.”

That simple. This is what is first recorded in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve turned their hearts away and stopped listening to God, and – they surely perished. They didn’t realize that true God is the source of life and everything good.

They thought that by not listening they will get more blessings. That they will be wise and will know everything on their own, without the Word of God. They were deceived to believe that it is more important to have God’s blessings than to have God Himself.

We can say that those who walk on the way of death have made God’s blessings into their gods. They expect that they will deliver what only true God can. They expect from them life, and security, and joy, and dignity, and so on.

This is what all people on the way of death believe. They believe that having enough God’s blessings will give them everything they may need. The problem is that it doesn’t work this way.

Nothing and no one else can give life to you. Nothing and no one else can save you from death. We may trust that our spouse will grant us security, and when they are suddenly gone, we are devastated.

We may trust that our possessions will give us life, but they just take our lives, our time and our joy and our peace, demanding to sacrifice them more and more. We may think that our careers will provide for us, and then one day we may find ourselves unemployed.

The way of death is the way without God. When you walk the way of death you don’t want to listen to God, when you don’t want to love Him, you don’t want to be with Him. You love His blessings and you hate the Giver.

The way of death is without a hope at the end. When we walk the way of death we ourselves need to fight for everything, but we can never fully enjoy what we have got, for we always live in the shadow of death. And at the end all perish.

And don’t make a mistake. We as Christians often step on the way of death. How? When we put more efforts into acquiring God’s blessings than into being with our loving God Himself. Then we need to turn around and return to Jesus.

Finally, what are we to do as Christians? The first thing we need to realize is that there is no neutral ground. There is only either the way of life and blessings, or the way of death and curse. There is no third way.

Many Christians have been deceived into believing that if only they try to be good people, they don't need to be with God and don't need to listen to Him.

Thus, they despise the Word of God and by doing that they push away the Holy Spirit, the Giver of life. And even worse, if they have got enough of God's blessings, they begin to believe that this is all they may need.

The Scriptures are clear, – we are either with our Father and with Jesus through the Holy Spirit, or we are on our own under the power of Satan. And when we hear about these two ways, we need to get the right picture.

We are not like people standing in crossroads and thinking which way to go. If we are even talking about these two ways before us, it means that we are already with our God.

When God spoke to Adam, He already had placed Adam in His presence and already had given Him all His blessings. When God spoke to the Israel, as we read it today, again, He had already rescued them from Egyptians.

He had already given them freedom, He had already made them His holy people and revealed them His wisdom. When Jesus spoke with His disciples about remaining in His words, He already had called them with the Holy Spirit.

The same is true about you. Today, when you hear these words, it means that you already have been chosen and called by God. It means that He already has given you His Spirit and has created you a new heart.

It means that you already are in His presence and He wants you to choose life and blessings, not death and curses. So, what shall we do as Christians? Choose the way of life! Choose God's presence and His blessings.

And it is a joyful choice; just keep listening to your God as and where He speaks to you and comes to you. Right here. Choose to obey His commandments and He will bless you. Choose the way of life!

You see, if you are here, you already are blessed beyond comprehension. It's true. You are already in God's presence and you are already listening to Him. It means, that you are already receiving life, true life, eternal life.

And in a few minutes, something unbelievable will happen. You, a little human creature, will be bodily united with your Creator, with the source of very life, in the Holy Meal of our Lord Jesus. You will eat and drink eternal life.

For Jesus has life in Himself, and He has come so that you can have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

Peace of God that surpasses all human understanding keep your mind and soul in Jesus Christ. Amen.