



THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

Soren Kierkegaard was a 19th century Danish philosopher who was a prolific writer. The first book he ever published was entitled “Either-Or”. In this book, he makes clear that life is about decisions – will we choose to do what is right or will we act for our own pleasure.

Life presents us with numerous decisions. Some are not that significant: What will I eat? What will I wear? Others shape our lives. Between the ages of 18-30, we face some of the most important decisions of our lives. What will I study? What occupation will I have? Who will I marry? How will I parent? Where will I live? These decisions influence our lives deeply. But Leviticus 26 actually presents us with the crucial decisions we must settle at some point in this life. And these decisions are crucial to our well-being.

Leviticus 26 sets out for us the choices between death and life, between the way of curses and the way of blessings. And God speaks to Moses about the choices that Israel as a nation must face. Will they walk in covenant with God, or will they walk their own way? The choice is not a both/and decision, but an either/or choice.

Worship God Sincerely (26:1-2)

This chapter begins by remembering and working out the implications of a relationship with God. God relates to us on the basis of ‘covenant’ – an agreement between two parties to be loyal and committed to one another. And the first decision we must settle is about worship.

As much as we might ask if we will worship, the Lord knows our hearts. As the 16th century theologian John Calvin said, “The heart is factory of idols.” If we refuse to worship the living God, we will craft an idol for ourselves and worship the god of our creation. For this reason, the first decision we must make is not about if we will worship, but what we will worship. Calvin is right – in the void of the worship of God, our hearts will fill themselves with other things to worship – friendship, leisure, sport, work, success, or fame. So God begins by restating the second commandment – do not make for yourselves any idol, and the sense here is forming anything else to be god.

This command also contains within it the idea that God alone is worthy of worship. While the other nations would fill their pantheon of gods, Israel was to worship God alone. Rather than representing him with images or statues, God is to be worshiped in spirit and truth because he is Spirit and cannot be captured by any one image or representation. So it is today – we worship God alone. When one of my brothers lived in East Asia, it was not uncommon to go into a home and find many statues of gods in a shrine in the home. When they would tell someone about Jesus, people liked the idea of having one more god – until they found out that Jesus demands total allegiance! Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).



THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

The second decision that Israel had to make in worshiping the Lord was to keep the day of rest – the Sabbath. This day was a sign that they were keeping covenant (Exod. 31:13, 17) and trusting God. By not working and harvesting, they were saying, “We trust you to provide.” To rest from work and to worship God alone was more than a decision to worship, but also to be reverential. They were to show reverence to God’s sanctuary – his dwelling place. By having the tabernacle in the middle of all of the Israelites in the wilderness, they had a visible reminder that God was to be central to their lives. In the same way, we as a church value reverence by keeping God central to everything in our lives. But we must make a decision – will I prioritize the worship of God or will other things crowd out fellowship with God and squeeze him out of Sunday morning? Make the worship of God a sincere commitment today!

Walk with God Wholeheartedly (26: 3-13)

Having called the people to worship him, God had promised to bless his people if they followed him. Notice the first word in v. 3 – “if”. This covenant had conditions to it – blessings for obedience, and curses for disobedience. This chapter parallels Deut. 28 in many ways but does not use the language of blessings and curses. But the ideas are here. The language is similar to a treaty a king would make with his subjects. The king would promise benefits to loyal subjects and punishments to traitors. Here we see the blessings.

The blessings were promised to a nation, not merely to an individual. They were both material and spiritual. And the reason for these blessings was to point the nations to God. As Israel walked with God, the nations would see the light of God and come to him. But the greatest blessing was not material, but spiritual.

God had promised five things. There would be plenty (vv. 4-5) – rain would come and they would have much. There would be peace (v. 6) – they would not have to fear their safety. There would be protection (vv. 7-8) – no enemy would overcome them. There would be prosperity (vv. 9-10) – as the nation grew and there were more people, God would feed the mouths. And there was the ultimate blessing – presence (vv. 11-13) – God’s presence would be with them like it was before Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. As Augustine would say,

“God will be the source of every satisfaction, more than any heart can rightly crave, more than life and health, food and wealth, glory and honour, peace and every good work – so that God...may be all in all. He will be the consummation of all our desiring – the object of our unending visions, of our unlesening love, of our unwearying praise. (cited in Tidball, *Leviticus BST*, p. 309).

Now when we hear those blessings, we can’t automatically apply these promises of Israel to us. As much as we usually think of blessings as material good (health, wealth, protection), we have to remember that God had promised these blessings to the nation. Where their hearts were, there would be their culture. These are not blessings so that you



THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

can have an easy life! The goal of anything God gives is so that we would follow him and be with him. So we must ask – if I have so much in my life, but don't have God, am I blessed? There are many who, in following God, find that they end up with less material possessions. But in having God, they have the satisfaction Augustine described. So the call of God is before us: walk with God wholeheartedly.

Listen to God Closely (26:14-39)

In these verses, it matches the discipline listed in Deut. 28 for disobedience. There are a lot of warnings here, probably due to Israel's wayward heart. Again, we see the word "if" – the responsibility for what happens is Israel's alone. And in each instance, the penalties will become more severe – as v. 18 says, "And if in spite of this you will not listen to me..." Each punishment for disobedience is complete and grows greater by the sevenfold nature of punishment.

Like any parent, God asks, "Are you listening?" It is more than just hearing the words, but like a parent asking if you are listening, God implies that listening means action. The punishments would grow, reversing the blessings just mentioned – from disease & defeat (vv. 14-17), drought (vv. 18-20), devastation (vv. 21-23), danger (vv. 24-26), and finally destruction (vv. 27-39).

When we read this passage and we think about curses, we get here the biblical idea of curse. But our modern idea gets in the way because we think of curses as powerful negative words spoken that have some sort of magic behind them that cannot be broken. The Bible doesn't have this idea of magical chants that create hexes or sufferings. Notice that in each instance, God says five times "IF" – that the consequences for disobedience reverse the blessings. But that word "if" is hopeful. For if we acknowledge our disobedience, there is a way back. These are God's "disciplines" as v. 23 makes clear. And the goal of all discipline is to see someone return to the way of life and hope.

God's discipline is a kind gift. His discipline is to wake you up, a kind call that will grow in seriousness if we do not listen to his ways. Like a good father, Proverbs 3:11-12 tells us that discipline is God's kindness to call us to repentance. So will you listen and heed God's correction? Just like a parent and the courts and the nations escalate the consequences for a failure to listen to correction, will we heed God's discipline? Will we see him as a loving Father correcting us for our good, or will we see him as a hostile opponent that we grow in hatred and resentment?

Confess to God Humbly (26:40-46)

God knew how difficult the people of Israel would be. But the last word is not a word of condemnation. Rather, grace has the last word. We know the rest of Israel's story – they failed to follow God and failed to listen to him and were disciplined as this chapter describes. And the reason they failed was due to sinful, unbelieving, uncircumcised



THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

hearts (v. 41). But restoration was promised if they confessed their sin. How can you change your heart? Only God can change a heart so that we make these decisions. Yes, they are our decisions, but they come from a will that has been changed. That is why v. 41 says “if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled...” – it isn’t that we make some decision and God says, “Finally!” Rather, God changes the heart and we decide to follow him, to listen to him. God regenerates the heart, which is why it isn’t “if they humble themselves” but rather “if...their...heart is humbled.” God stirs your heart so that you might confess and believe and follow. He wants your heart. And when we humbly confess, God remembers all of his love and kindness to you.

And all of these blessings and curses are intended to point us to...

See the Glory of Christ

While the blessings and curses were given to Israel as a whole nation, not merely to an individual, Jesus comes and makes these truths apply to us in a very personal way. While the direction of Israel would determine whether their future would be one of blessings or curses, Christians have this hope: all those who trust in Christ will never experience the curse of God.

The reason you do not have to suffer the wrath of God is because of Jesus. When you trust in him, he gives you the blessings of God and takes the curses of sin upon himself. Paul says this in Galatians 3:10-14 (READ).

We escape the curse not because of our sorrow for sin, but because God showed his mercy and we trust in Christ who bore the wrath of God so that we might have life! If there is any discipline that we receive, it is as Hebrews 12:6-11 says (READ).

The NT makes it clear that God does not “punish” Christians. Rather, he disciplines. There is no sense in the NT of God punishing Christians, convicting them as though they are criminals, or treating them as people worthy of wrath. Just like a good parent corrects their child and doesn’t let them continue in bad behaviours and habits, so the Lord disciplines us to train us to become the people we should be. Punishment and conviction is for those who stubbornly refuse to listen and obey, and the consequence is to be far from God, far from his presence.

In Jesus, your curses can be taken and all of God’s blessings poured out. And in the place of those punishments and curses, God gives you the greatest blessing you could ever have. It is better than material wealth, better than fame, better than success. He gives you his very presence. Jesus not only promises to his presence, he takes up residence in your life by the Spirit of Christ. All of the blessings of heaven are then applied to your life – every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is yours! Paul says in Ephesians 1 that whatever blessings Christ has received, you have received! Whatever is his is yours! And



THE STORY OF
Everything
LUKE 24:27

he will take you to the eternal city where there is nothing accursed, where you can worship before the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:3).

The choice is yours. Blessings or Curses? Following or pulling away? Listening or Ignoring? Confessing or Denying? Choose life.