

As many of you know I have a cat. I think the day I got him from the shelter it was one of the most stressful days of his life. He was bundled into a basket and driven down the M25. I don't know if you've ever taken a cat down the m25 but trust me they don't like it – and they'll very vocally express to you they don't like it. After a rather traumatic journey for all concerned we reached his home. A new, better, but unknown place. As far as the cat's now concerned the basket is the safest place he knows. When you bring a cat to a new home you have to let it choose to leave the basket and its perceived safety. There's a new life waiting for them but they have to stop hiding in a cage, and step out of it to start that life.

Well today we stand with the Israelites on the edge of their new home, the Promised Land, as they prepare to step into it and choose life.

Deuteronomy records the words Moses spoke to this people when they were finally ready to enter the place they shrank back from in fear 40 years ago. He's getting the people ready for the life that lies ahead in a new, better but unknown place. Preparing them to live for God. And so Moses commands the people to leave the old ways of living, the fake 'gods' and old loves behind, lays out says how to take the Promised Land and why it must be that way, tells the people how to serve the Lord and in doing all this be blessed in the land.

The people have been told in no uncertain terms how to live for God, something Moses reminds them of with some rather wonderful sass at the start of our passage. Moses knows this people, all too well – and how easily they forget. SO he repeats the essence of the law, as has done again and again to this people. LOVE the Lord your God and live like you do. Why you obey is just as important as how. Don't begrudgingly serve, half-heartedly follow or pay lip service to Him once a week. Love Him AND LIVE that Love by keeping His commands – it's 2 sides of the same coin. Life consists in of loving God and holding fast to Him.

But God isn't going to force this people to love Him. There is a choice to be made. Choose life and keep God's commands or

go against God. Or choose what isn't God – whatever that thing may be- and every consequence of that – a life which takes you away from God and ultimately ends with destruction. There is no third way. No, 'I'll park myself here with a deckchair', option kinda following God but still doing what I like. The choice is either to choose God and life by following His commands or choose another way and drift from God. Not choosing God is choosing the other way. But why follow God's commands.

Have you ever tried to make a lego set? Have you ever tried without the instructions? You can try on your own but it's unlikely you'll be able to figure out the intricacies of a 3500 piece lego set without some help from the maker of this impossibly detailed toy - i.e. the

instructions. The maker knows better than anyone else how things should be for his creation. Well God is our maker and so when He lays out the blueprints for a way to live its worth taking a look.

Love God, walk in obedience to Him and keep His commands. A fair question is what does this mean for us today considering it refers to the first 5 books of the Bible and the commands therein? In some cases this will look very similar to Moses times & in others very different. For moral commands (for instance don't murder, steal, commit adultery) the command still stands. For civil decrees (such as the detailed laws to ensure the poor and marginalised are looked after) the principles remain, and they are important, but they'll enacted differently

in various times & places. The ceremonial law (such as food code and sacrifices) is a law for a pre-Jesus people who related God through those things as they lived before Jesus. We live knowing Jesus, who is our one sacrifice for sin & He makes us right with God – so those commands don't apply to us because Jesus fulfils their requirements. This may seem a tangent but it's important we understand the difference between these commands because we're being told to walk in them today and need to be able to make sense of that and because they're in the Bible therefore God speaks into today through them. From our individual lives to fairness in our justice system God's commands speak life for individuals and life for the flourishing of a nation.

But does following God's commands always feel like life to you? I asked myself this question and wondered if I was confusing life with ease or fun, like a child demanding sweets on tap. Take for instance the command to give generously to God, as Chris preached on a few weeks ago. Choosing not to use money exactly how you'd like to isn't easy but those who do so usually find it life giving. It may not be fun in the way another holiday is but the joy of seeing a church go further in its mission, a missionary better enabled, or someone in poverty given hope is a greater and deeper joy than the pleasures we pick ourselves.

God's way is the best way, it's a wonderful and life-giving way to live. But it's not always easy. Deuteronomy 31

exemplifies this. It's the start of a new address. Joshua is commissioned leader and the Israelites are urged to follow him into their long awaited, promised land. God's glorious gift to them. And it features the command not to be afraid twice in as many breaths, presumably because they're being asked to do something scary. Surely choosing life shouldn't be scary?

Well sometimes it is. God doesn't stay static, He calls His people on to new more wonderful things but that means taking big steps of faith into the unknown, or sometimes known fears. There were fortresses, soldiers and big, scary, giants in this promised land. God had something good for His people but they wouldn't get it without a fight. The Israelites could



choose to lay hold of all God had for them and to live His way or choose not to, and never know the fullness of the blessing or all they could become. The urging to choose life isn't just for individuals – it's a call to choose life for God's people.

Being commanded not to be afraid can seem callous— after all we can't really help our feelings, but What I love is WHY they are commanded not to be afraid. Not because things will be easy but because God goes with and ahead of them.

Because God will not abandon them in their fight to take hold of that which He has in store for them. He's promised them something good which they will get – he just hasn't promised it will be easy.

As a church it's hard not to feel some parallels with this people. I think it's rare

I've felt a passage speak to us as much as this one has. We have a choice for St Nics. Press on into all God has for us because there is more, but press on even when it means the unknown and sacrifice, when it means facing giants, when it means hard work; or decide it all looks a bit too hard and never know what could have been if, collectively as a church, we'd stepped out in faith to see all this church could become, trusting the Lord really would never leave or forsake us. The Bible shows us God has far more in mind for His people than they'll ever realise. Moses knew this and he used his last address to his people to urge them, to plead with them. chose life – and don't just chose it for yourself. Chose it for God's people.

Our time in Deuteronomy is over but I hope you've seen more of the big picture of God's great plan for His people. A plan we're invited to step into. The choice the Israelites faced is laid out for us. Choose to turn from God and every consequence of that. Or choose God, because God is life, and live every outworking of that – listen to His voice and live the life He calls you to. If you're contemplating that choice for the first time believe me it is the best, most wonderful, life giving choice you will make, it is the most glorious way to live. It's not always easy, sometimes it's scary but we're never left alone for God will never leave or give up on anyone who chooses Him. And who else has the words

of eternal life? For those of us who've already made that choice dare to make it more fully, for yourself and for your church. Choose life and prepare yourself to go to whatever real or metaphorical place God calls us, and know the Lord our God will go with and before us.