

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I want you to imagine this situation. You've been diagnosed with a rare virus. It always kills the infected person in exactly 48 hours. But you feel pretty good up until the end. The news spreads quickly among family and friends. Everyone near and far comes to town to see you. With just a few hours left, all of your family and friends, co-workers and neighbors, sorrowfully gather to say their goodbyes. You're given a conference room in the hospital to address everyone at once. These will be your final words to everyone who has ever meant something to you in your life.

What are you going to tell them? What's most important to say? Are you going to talk about the weather? Probably not. Are you going to talk about the upcoming, redesigned Mustang GT? Are you going to talk about the LeBron James deciding to play basketball in Miami? I don't think so.

You'll want to speak of things of greater importance. But what will you say? How will you say it? I would challenge you to give that serious thought. We are so distracted on a daily basis with things of relative unimportance. Today I want you to set it all aside and focus on the very core. What is your life built upon. What do you want to pass along to the people you love before your life on this earth ends?

In our Old Testament lesson for today which also serves as our sermon text, Moses was in this exact situation. God had revealed to Moses that his life would soon end. He was old, but he was still strong and in good health. He had led the people right up to the Promised Land. But God told him he would not enter.

Now Moses was standing before the people of Israel. This was his final address to them. We are reading a part of that farewell address. In it we see what Moses, a great man of God, considered of utmost importance. Perhaps this will also help us to refocus on what is most important. For Moses, it all came down to this. He told the people he loved, his fellow countrymen, that it came down to life or death.

We read Deuteronomy 30:11-20 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

When his life was on the line, when he wanted to get down to the root and core of what was most important, Moses chose to talk about matters of life and death with his fellow Israelites. And that's what it comes down to: God offers only two options: Life or death. Which will you have?

Some apparently complained to Moses that the way of life was too hard to know, or was too difficult to follow. Moses didn't agree. He said, "**Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.**"

Have you ever been tempted to think that the path to life which God offers is too hard to know and understand? Philosophers and religions of all ages have tried to offer their opinion about the proper path of life. If we listen to all the opinions, Satan may confuse us so we start to believe that the path of life God offers is mysterious and hard to understand. And if we listen to most religious teachers, they will tell us that following God is so difficult that only very few are able to acquire the blessings which God offers.

The Bible, however, tells us something different. The path of life is so understandable and easy that even children can understand it. Jesus said, (Mark 10:14-15) "**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.**"

And what is the simple truth – the simple way – which brings life? Moses tells Israel that if they love God, walk in his ways, and keep his commands, then they would live. If they are not obedient, if they worship other gods, they will be destroyed. It really is that simple! If we are to live, God wants us to understand this. First of all, he is a holy God. If we are to be his children, we must be holy like him. Our will must be perfectly in line with his will. Our attitude must be the same as God's. In all our actions we must perfectly obey his commands. This is not hard to understand, is it? God says to love him perfectly, honor him in all we say and do, and read and study his Word. He says we must love our neighbor as ourselves which means we will honor all in authority, never hurt or harm anyone, never gossip, always defend those who cannot defend themselves, always be content, never steal, etc. These things are not hard to understand. It's also not hard to understand that if we fail to all the things perfectly which I just mentioned, God cannot allow us to live in his presence, and we are on the path to death and destruction.

While this is easy to understand, we all know that following God's law is *not* something that is easy to do. In fact, it is impossible for us to be perfect as God demands. Once we understand that we are in grave danger, and that we cannot save ourselves from death and destruction, then God wants us to hear and understand a second very important truth. God himself provides a way for us to be on the path of life.

When Jesus walked this earth, he chose the path of life. Unlike us, he walked that path, and never turned to one side or the other. His words and actions were never wrong. He obeyed his Father every minute of every day. Jesus walked the path of life. But don't be mistaken... he didn't walk that path in order to show us how we can walk that path. No, he walked that path *in our place*. The Father considers Christ Jesus' walk of life to be ours. When his Son obeyed, God

considered it our obedience. When his Son loved, served, helped, healed and prayed, God saw us doing those things.

But Christ, at the end of his life, intentionally stepped off the path of life and chose to walk down the path of death. Because he knew death and destruction awaited each of us, Christ walked down the path of death *for* us. Although we needed the righteousness of his life, we also needed the payment for sin which was accomplished by Christ's death. Our Savior picked up the full load of sin from each of us. As Christ walked down the path of death, he suffered, the sky darkened, and his heavenly Father forsook him. The path of death came to an end when our Savior cried out "It is finished." He lowered his head, and breathed no more. The sins he bore were buried with him in the grave near Calvary.

We are filled with joy when we remember how our Savior rose from the dead on the third day. He rose, and left all our sins buried in the grave. Jesus lives! And through faith in him, we are on the path of life together with Jesus. In Christ, we have the holiness, righteousness, obedience that are essential for being on the path of life. Entirely by God's goodness and God's choice, our sin is forgiven and life is ours.

The way of life is easy to understand. It is through Christ and Christ alone. And since Christ gave us new life and placed us on the path of life, won't we live new lives now... lives that are full of life just like Jesus'? When we know all that Christ did for us and trust in him, we will joyfully and eagerly obey our Father in heaven, listen to his voice, and keep his commands. We do these things because we know that in Christ, we are already accepted and loved by the Father. It's the only appropriate response from those who believe!

Those who reject the Savior will not listen to God's voice. They will not hear his Word wherever it may be found... not in the Bible, not in church, not from the mouths of our fellow Christians. Those who reject the Savior will not obey God's commands. Rather, they will live their lives as they see fit, and not consider God's will. Those who refuse the Savior will not love God, and they will reveal this lack of love in the way they treat those around them. All people who live without Jesus are on the path of death.

Dear brothers and sisters, we stand at a crossroads. We don't know when our time on earth will end. Two paths are before each of us. One path leads to death and destruction. The other path leads to eternal life and joy. Heed the words in our text, "**This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life.**"

Remember the beginning of the sermon. You're diagnosed with a virus that will end your life in 48 hours. Isn't this the time when you're on your knees joyfully thanking and praising your God who loved you enough to put you on the path of life? Aren't you praising him for loving you so much that he sent his one and only Son to live for you. To die for you. And to rise again, to guarantee that you are on the path of life?

And when everyone whose touched your life gathers together in that hospital conference room and you have a chance to address them. What will you talk about? Won't you talk about matters of life and death? Won't you lay before them the path of life that opened by the Lord Jesus Christ? I pray that you would in such a situation.

But let's bring this back to reality. You're not in that situation. So you can afford to spend time talking about the weather, the Mustang and LeBron James, right? Well, yes and no. God has given us our talents and interests and hobbies. We can talk about those things. But understand... we don't know how many days God has given us here on earth. Some of us here may be in our final 48 hours of life. Or maybe God has chosen to give you many more years. But there is someone in your sphere of contact that whose life will end in the next 48 hours.

It's easy to put off sharing Christ with someone. "I'll do that tomorrow. Or next week. Or maybe next year." Friends there might not be a next week. Together with Moses, let us feel the urgency. God has placed before every human being only two paths... one leading to eternal life, the other to eternal death. You know many people who don't know the way that leads to life, don't you? The situation is urgent! Time is short.

Think of 2 or 3 people that you can tell *this week* about the danger of sin and unbelief, and about the free forgiveness which is ours in Christ Jesus. God has offered the gift of life to all! The path of life is an open gate. Let us encourage one another so we remain on this path. Let us do all that we can... urgently... immediately... to help others find this path. **"Love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life."** Amen.

And the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will guard and keep your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.