



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

The Legacy of Blessing, The Blessing of Legacy

June 28, 2009

Dr. Matthew J. Hook

Deuteronomy 30:15—30

Personality, beauty, talent, discipline, hard work, and timing. Who'd have thought that one day we'd ever put Ed McMahan, Farrah Faucet, and Michael Jackson together. The personality of Ed McMahan, the beauty of Farrah Faucet, and the talent of Michael Jackson. I wonder if they were ever in the same room at the same time? But all of them passed away last week. As writer Arsenio Orteza writes, "It's tempting to reduce [them] to a warning sign on the wide road to destruction. It's tempting to think we knew them. In fact, it's the rare individual who can even know himself. I share this Psalm not as an indictment in any way, but as I was already preaching on legacy, it struck me hard this week. Listen to Psalm 49: *12 But humanity, despite its riches, does not endure; each person is like the beasts that perish. 13 This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. Selah 14 Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. 15 But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself. Selah 16 Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; 17 for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him. 18 Though while he lived he counted himself blessed—and men praise you when you prosper—19 he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light of life. 20 A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish.* Psalm 49

As we are walking through and looking to see what the legacy of these celebrities will be, I want us to look at a 3,000 year old legacy, given by Moses. Moses was giving his final words to the Israelites. They had followed him from slavery in Egypt, through the 10 plagues, across the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for 40 years, through battles, challenges, and trials. The Law, including the 10 Commandments, were now given. And just before they enter the Promised Land, Moses stands before them, near death himself, and delivers these words: "*15 See, I set before you today **life and prosperity, death and destruction.** 16 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. 17 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, 18 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. 19 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** 20 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.***"

Here's what's ironic: You and I face the same decision 2000 years later: life and prosperity, death and destruction. Life...and death. Blessings and curses. You have the full gamut of options. You have today the ability to choose is a blessing...or a curse.

The first thing this does is it shows us: YOU. You have been handed a choice.

In other words, God says not all choices are the same. There is a difference.

Now, we've been fed the idea that all choices are legit, if we are being true to ourselves;

That your choices are your choices and they don't really matter, as long as they don't affect me; that all roads are basically the same. But Moses' very words present the opposite view of reality. He says you face choices

every day, and THERE IS A DIFFERENCE between them. Your choices matter. And the distinction is huge: Some lead to life, and some lead toward death. And Moses instructs: (Listen to the verbs he calls us to) “*love, walk in His ways, keep His commands, live, increase, ... choose life, so that you and your children may live 20 and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.*”

But we don't “hold” very “fast” to God, do we? (as Christians, let alone the world!) Our stinging words, our attitudes, our schedules, our addictions, our entertainment, our apathy, our ignoring people in true need. The fact is, even though we've chosen to be loved by God, we choose that old curse all the time. It makes you realize our streets, our homes, and our church are filled with the walking-wounded. And how weird that those of us who follow Christ understand that we have a cure. Or rather, we know the One with the cure, Jesus. The One who is the cure. But if that's true, then why do we still battle? Why do we struggle so much? Even in the midst of it all, I don't despair because I believe underneath even the most cynical person in the world is a parched soul gasping for life. The Bible has never been more relevant or more needed than it is today.

I honestly believe eternity is on the line, and your power to choose is the greatest challenge *and adventure* you will ever face, no matter *what* your occupation. Your power to choose is what distinguishes you as made in God's image. Your choices are your greatest challenge and your greatest adventure. Why would you invest anywhere else than meeting here? Change what people worship, you change their passion. Change their passion, and you change a life. Begin changing lives, and you change a community. Change more and more people, and you'll change the world. That's our mission, church. *That's* the legacy *we* want to leave. You may be saying “I get it! *I'll* use my life and my resources and my talents for *that!*” So we set out basically to bless people. Don't leave a legacy of regret. Leave a legacy of blessing.

No matter what, you will leave a legacy: either for good or bad. Whatever those seeds are you are scattering right now, that's what you will sow. Whatever you are spreading around, they're beginning to take root and sprout up. Are you scattering seeds of hope and encouragement and generosity, or seeds of bitterness, spite, and selfishness? Which will it be? Blessings or curses? Paul writes this truth to the Galatians in 6:7-10 “*A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* [So Paul says:] *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*” We *do* want to make a difference. And that takes all of us, living and giving to God's work.

Thanks to the curse of sin, our society, our health, our work for justice, and our way of life are being affected on every side. Maybe you're being hit from all sides too. It sure seems to be going to the dogs. Interesting that in The Message version of Psalm 49, it reads “*20 We aren't immortal. We don't last long. Like our dogs, we age and weaken. And die.*” Why? The Psalmist says: “*This is what happens to those who live for the moment, who only look out for themselves. Death herds them like sheep straight to hell; they disappear down the gullet of the grave; they waste away to nothing – nothing left but a marker in a cemetery.*”

When we continue to live above it all, or escaping it all, *we're* the ones who “*waste away to nothing – nothing left but a marker in a cemetery.*” For some, that grave marker is the only mark they make on the world. In Psalm 49, God encourages us to fix our eyes on the things that *endure*. If eternity is a never ending line in both directions, your life is like a dot on that line. Which do you live for – the dot, or the line? In light of eternity, the only thing that will outlive you is that which you do that is connected to eternity. The only blessing that will last is the one that points to Jesus Christ. It's also the only thing that will ultimately fulfill you. So, is God's message that we just be more self-disciplined? Just rely on our power to “Choose blessing,

not curses, life, not death”? Not entirely, though I think we underestimate our ability to be self-disciplined. Many of us are self-disciplined, but we’re not leaving a legacy. Listen again to the Psalmist from the Message version: *“This is what happens to those who live for the moment, who only look out for themselves. Death herds them like sheep straight to hell”* 13, 14.

That language is our first clue. It’s *not* just about self-discipline, but about WHO you are serving. Who do you look out for? Jesus said *“No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and money.”* (Matthew 6:24). The first half of Psalm 49 says we are spiritually robbed all along by our trust in money when we face death. Those who only look out for themselves, trusting in their resources, are like sheep led to Hell. It is there that death, that last and terrifying enemy, is their dreadful shepherd.

It’s not just about self-discipline. It’s about a shepherd. In Psalm 49 the shepherd is death. But there’s another Psalm about a Shepherd, and it starts like this, in Psalm 23: *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.”* And it ends with *“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”* Here’s the irony: any one of those in Psalm 49 could have had the Lord as their Shepherd. Instead, they have death. He writes *“They disappear down the gullet of the grave; they waste away to nothing – nothing left but a marker in a cemetery. But me? God snatches me from the clutch of death, he reaches down and grabs me.”* Who? God - the other shepherd.

What’s the problem with the news of our world? What’s the problem that keeps us from experiencing the blessing? I don’t mean to oversimplify, but it’s just this: we’ve lost our shepherd. We haven’t really lost our shepherd; **we’ve switched shepherds.** We’ve lost God as our center. We live as practical atheists. We say we believe in God, but we serve the other master all week long. There’s really not much difference between *our* homes and anybody else’s. We live between Sundays as though God doesn’t exist. We’ve lost our center. A long time ago, a teacher took an LP (that’s a record for all of you young people) record of Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus, and drilled a hole just ¼ of an inch off center, and played it for his class. What was once some of the world’s most beautiful music now sounded like the cackling of witches. When we lose our center, we quickly become no more than the cackling of witches. When the church loses its center, it is much the same. Let me ask: Are you living with the wrong center in your life?

Jesus himself said *“I am the Good Shepherd – the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”* (John 10:11) Do you know that Jesus laid down his life for you? For this generation? Do the children in your life know that the Good Shepherd laid down his life for them? That he paid the penalty of death for their sin? Be a blessing, that the world may know Jesus the Christ. May you use the personality, the beauty, the talent, and your own the hard work to live as a blessing of God for people, so that even after the time when no one remembers your name, your legacy can live on in the lives of people, that they will know that Good Shepherd and let Him transform their lives and legacy as well. Amen!