

# "Moses' Legacy: A Closing Kick"

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

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"When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Those are the first two sentences of the only Declaration in history to have its own holiday! And tomorrow once more, we'll celebrate those words, all 106 of them. But what will really be celebrating?

Some of us, I suppose will be celebrating "the pursuit of happiness." And in celebration of those famous words, we'll fire up the barbeque, invite our friends and family to gather, and grab our lawn chairs as it gets dark and find a spot to watch the fireworks.

Some of us will probably go deeper than that. So in addition to making time for some happiness in our lives, we'll also make time for some sober reflection. And as we do we'll remember that the word "liberty" precedes "happiness" in the Declaration. We'll recall not only what "liberty" is but what it has cost Americans to achieve and maintain it over the last 235 years. And we'll recall with gratitude the sacrifices that have been made by those who've known that "that freedom is never free."

But I wonder, I wonder how many of us will go even deeper. I wonder how many of us will look further back in the Declaration of Independence and consider the word "life?" "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which is the right to life ..."

It's the first right the Declaration says God has given us. Behind the right to happiness, behind the right to liberty, the Declaration talks about a right to "life." But what kind of life does it mean? What kind of life is it trying to describe? Is it just trying to describe physical life, or is it trying to point us towards something more?

I believe, my friends, with all my heart that the Declaration is trying to point us towards something more. I believe it is trying to point us towards the same truth that the words of Moses were trying to point out to his people as they stood at the edge of the wilderness and prepared to enter the promised land.

Remember what Moses said to them, " This day," he said, "This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses ... I have set before you life and death ... 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."

And in those words, Moses defines life, doesn't he? And he defines it as something more than physical. He defines life as an opportunity, an opportunity given by God our Creator to every human being. God, says Moses, has given us life so that we might learn to love the Lord, to listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him.

So tell me, is that how you think about life? Because that's how I believe the framers of the Declaration thought about life. You see, of the 56 men who finally signed the Declaration of Independence, 52 of them were Christians. The other four were Deists. And together all of them believed in a Creator and in the wisdom of the Scriptures. And as a result of their beliefs, there is notable similarity between the words of the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence and the words of Deuteronomy.

For like Deuteronomy which talks about "blessing", the Declaration talks about "happiness." Like Deuteronomy which presents people with the freedom to "choose," the Declaration presents the people with "liberty." And like Deuteronomy which says God has offered His people "life," the Declaration says that all of us are endowed by our Creator with "life."

So I don't know about you, but when I consider who the writers of the Declaration were, and the knowledge that we have about their faith in God and in the Bible, it doesn't seem much of a stretch to me to believe that the words of Deuteronomy were very much there in the back of their minds as they framed the famous words in the Declaration about "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

And it doesn't seem difficult at all to think that when they wrote that phrase and began it with the word life, they were thinking of life not only in a physical sense, but in a spiritual sense too. Because that's what Moses was thinking about in Deuteronomy.

His life was drawing to a close. He was 120 years old! And the desire of Moses heart according to Deuteronomy was to speak one last sermon in the hearing of his people.

Deuteronomy 30 is the conclusion of that sermon. And like a runner saving something for the finish, Moses finishes preaching to his people with a closing kick.

Do you know what that is? A closing kick is a runner's term. It describes the desire of every great runner. For when a great runner gets to the end of a race, they try to insure that they have the strength to sprint to "kick" to the finish line.

Craig Brian Larson is a writer and several years ago, he wrote these words. "Recently," he wrote, "I read a study of all the leaders in the Bible. One of the most alarming characteristics in the study was that most of these leaders finished their lives and their service to God poorly. They didn't finish that way though, because they fell deeply into sin in some way. Most of them didn't.

Instead it was the little sins that lead them away from God, the poor choices they made that accumulated in their lives. And the accumulation of those little sins sapped their lives and caused them not to finish their service for God with the same strength they had when they started."

Then Craig says the study showed him something. It proved to him, he says, "that one of the defining factors in leading a great life is learning how to stop that from happening, learning instead how to finish life strong."

So for the next few weeks, during the month of July that's the concept I want us to consider: finishing well, finishing strong. How can you and I, when we come toward the end of any chapter in our lives still be building a legacy for God and for His Kingdom, instead of resting on our laurels? How can we lead life so we have a closing kick, instead of simply limping across the finish line?

Moses' closing kick as a preacher and leader is found in the last few chapters of Deuteronomy. And in the next few weeks, we're going to look together at those last few chapters. Today we're starting with chapter 30 because here we find part of the secret of what enabled Moses to finish the final chapter of his life well.

In fact, the Bible says, that when Moses finished the final chapter of his life, he walked away from it and walked straight into the arms of God. Wouldn't you like to do that at the end of your life? Wouldn't you like to walk straight from the final chapter of your life into the arms of God? And wouldn't you like before you did that to leave behind you words that truly summarize what your life has been all about?

If you would; if you'd like to leave a legacy like Moses, then I invite you to do something tomorrow on the Fourth of July, and throughout this next week. I invite you to take five

minutes each morning to read the closing words of Deuteronomy 30. Read from verse 11 to the end of the chapter just as we've done here in worship this morning. Read the words as if Moses was speaking them to you.

Then ask yourself, have I been choosing life lately? Have I been choosing real life? Have I been choosing a love for God above every other love in my life? Have I been choosing to listen to Him and the laws He's given me to govern my morals and my conduct? Have I been choosing to hold tight to God's expectations for me? Have I been running the race of my life so that I'll be able to say at the end of my life what Moses said at the end of His? Have I saved some spiritual energy in my life for a closing kick?

Jim Collins is a name, some of you probably know. Jim's a former Stanford Professor who's become a writer, speaker, consultant, and coach to some of America's most successful businesses and executives. He's the author of five best-selling books and in his one of them, a book called, *Good to Great*, Jim writes these words. Listen.

"The coaching staff of a high school cross-country running team got together for dinner after winning its second state championship in two years. The program had been transformed in the previous five years from good (top 20 in the state) to great (consistent contenders for the state championship on both the boys' and girls' teams).

"I don't get it," said one of the coaches. "Why are we so successful? We don't work any harder than other teams. And what we do is so simple. Why does it work?"

He was referring to their strategy: "We run best at the end. We run best at the end of workouts. We run best at the end of races. And we run best at the end of the season, when it counts the most."

Everything this team did, Collins writes, was geared to this simple idea, and the coaching staff knew how to create this effect better than any other team in the state.

For instance, they placed a coach at the 2-mile mark of a three mile race to collect data on each runner. Then the coaches would calculate not how fast the runners were going, but how fast they would need to go to pass the runners in front of them by the end of the race. They would train to make that time.

And in response to the training, the kids on their team learned how to pace themselves so they could race with confidence: They had learned how to say "we know how to save our best for the last."

The question is, do we? Do we know how to save our best for last? And if you're in doubt about it, then once again this morning, I invite you to take time to listen to a great coach, to a man who knew how to finish strong. His name is Moses and his closing words in his final sermon are part of his lasting legacy to us. They can teach us how to finish strong.

So take time to read them tomorrow, and take time to pray them for yourself and for America.

Let's pray ....