

Life Is about Choices
Deuteronomy 30:11-20; I Corinthians 3:1-9

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Wael Ghonim is a name Egyptian children will learn one day from their history books. He's the young Egyptian Google executive who has sparked a revolution in Egypt. Ghonim and others began to call for freedom for the Egyptian people, for jobs and democracy in the land they love. When his friend and fellow activist Khalid Said was beaten to death by police, Ghonim created a Facebook page in his memory. That seemingly innocent page was instrumental in mobilizing a younger generation that took to the streets demanding freedom and democracy.

Ghonim was arrested and accused by his government of belonging to "traitors to Egypt" and "foreign agents." As he sat in prison for twelve nights, the protests outside grew larger and larger and louder and louder. During his days behind bars, he says that he sang the Egyptian protest song "Dream with Me," which has become the anthem of the revolution. In part, the lyrics go this way:

Dream with me of a tomorrow that is coming. No matter how many times we fall we'll be able to rise again, find the way through the challenge of the dark clouds.... Dream with me....

And dream the people of Egypt have. Standing erect with their heads bowed, their bodies being blasted with water hoses, they have dreamed of freedom. Amid barbed wire with tanks threatening, they've dreamed of freedom. As the Muslim faithful bowed in Cairo's Tahrir Square and prayed, their Coptic Christian friends circled them with protection. Then the Christians bowed to pray, and the Muslims stood guard, all prayers, hopes, and dreams for freedom. Hundreds of lawyers in black robes marched, joined by medical doctors in white lab coats. Students beat drums and sang. One older Egyptian woman pleaded, "Just once in my lifetime, I want to elect my president."

Friday about 10 a.m. our time wild cheers of joy erupted across Egypt when embattled President Hosni Mubarak, after thirty years of authoritarian

rule, announced his resignation. Euphoria filled the ancient streets of Cairo. People danced a dance of freedom. Grown men wept for joy as the promise of a new day opened before them. Interestingly, though, others were cautious. They were cautious because no one knows the future. This revolution could produce great good, but not necessarily. Some know that important *choices* now must be made, or the promise of a new day could be dashed.

The emotion and magnitude of what is happening in Egypt today reminds me of what happened there many centuries earlier. Another people lived under authoritarian rule in Egypt. They had been driven from their homes, pushed off their land, and separated from their God. For nearly 60 years, they labored under a terrible taskmaster in Egypt, until God raised up a prophet: the man named Moses. God used Moses to deliver the people of Israel from their slavery. After a series of plagues upon the people of Egypt and a dramatic departure that included the parting of the Red Sea, Moses and the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. It was not what the people expected. Some, discouraged and angry, began to rebel against Moses, fearing that God had abandoned them and saying that it might have been better had they stayed in Egypt. At least there they had food to eat.

Moses knew better. He knew that the One who delivered them from slavery would also guide them safely through the wilderness. Moses believed that God would allow them to place their feet upon the soil of the Promised Land. And they are nearly there in our text from the book of Deuteronomy. This text is one of the most dramatic scenes in the Old Testament. The whole book of Deuteronomy, one theologian says, reaches its climax in these few verses (Patrick D. Miller, *Interpretation*). Moses and the people of Israel were on the border. The only thing between them and their Promised Land was the Jordan River, less than half the width of the Tennessee River. They could peer across the Jordan and see the land of their fathers and mothers, that land flowing with milk and honey promised to them by God. Be aware that these people had never lived in this land. They were born either in Egypt or the wilderness and knew the Promised Land only from the stories handed down by the elders. And now, there it was, the mythic Promised Land, directly before them.

In a highly electric moment, Moses stood to speak. Scholars call this speech “the great farewell address of Moses.” It was a farewell because Moses would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. He had faithfully

served God, but he would die before they crossed the Jordan. Imagine the euphoria that must have filled their ranks. Imagine the dance the people were prepared to dance, the tears of joy that must have flowed as they looked out and saw their promise. Yet Moses was cautious. Moses knew that no one knows the future. Yes, great potential for good existed. But Moses knew. Important *choices* had to be made, or their promise could be dashed.

This is one of the lessons I've always tried to drive home to youth, including my own daughters. Life is about choices. Every day we make choices that determine the direction of our lives. No one begins addicted to drugs. No, that starts with a choice. No one begins at the door of a prison cell. That starts with a choice. No one begins life with deep emotional and spiritual scars. No, they come with our choices. We all begin with the promise, and then our choices determine what happens. It is true for the freedom seekers in Egypt today. It was true for ancient Israel. And it is true for you and me. Life is about choices.

That's what Moses was trying to tell the people in this dramatic speech. There at the edge of the Jordan River, with the promise before them, he challenged them to choose well, knowing that poor choices could ruin the promise. We've all seen it, haven't we? Some kid has great innate ability. Smart. Good looking. Talented. From the outside looking in, we know that he or she could be or do practically anything. Perhaps go into medicine and provide care for the sick. Maybe become a scientist and design the next spacecraft. Possibly a professional athlete and be a role model for youth. Practically anything. But we begin to hear the rumors, then see the telltale signs, and then the ruin. Dashed. So much promise. Such potential. All ruined by poor choices.

Moses knew it, so he challenged the people of Israel to choose well. God was setting before them life and death, prosperity and adversity. The promise was God's. The choice was theirs.

It's interesting what 40 years in the wilderness will do to some. That was a lifetime in their day. Some had quit believing in the promise. They had grown discouraged, angry, bitter, and doubted the promise. So Moses had to remind them that the land of promise really was possible. It's not far off like the heavens, he told them, so that someone has to go to the heavens and get it. Neither was it beyond the sea, so that someone would have to

cross the sea to retrieve it. Moses said, “No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.” He wanted them to believe that the promise really was possible.

Sometimes we need to be reminded of that, too, that the promise of God really is possible for us. Sometimes we become so enslaved to our past, so beaten down and discouraged, that we cease believing in the promise. And we may wonder aloud, “Where is your promise for my life, Lord? It hasn’t turned out the way I wanted. This is not what I expected when I was 21 or 51. Is it really possible that You still have a promise for me, Lord?”

The word of hope in this text is “yes.” Oh, we must never abandon our hope that God has a promise for each of us. For our youth and all the rest of us, God has a promise. And it is so close you can taste it. It is so near that it is within our hearts. We must believe it and embrace it. The choice is ours.

So finally Moses invited his people to go home. After years of slavery and wandering in the wilderness, Moses invited the people to cross the Jordan and be home. The Promised Land was not just a tract of dirt. It was their faith, their connection with God. It was their spiritual home. They had wandered long enough. So Moses invited them to return to their home.

It’s our invitation, too. We wander away from our spiritual home. Sometimes it is because of disappointment with the faith. It has not done for us what we expected. Maybe we thought our faith would shield us from hurt and disappointment. Maybe it is a combination of many things, but we find ourselves away from home spiritually. And today we hear the invitation of Moses. Go home. Reconnect with God. Go home.

Choices. Life is about choices. For youth. For all of us. And these choices determine the direction of our lives. Today we are invited to come home. To God. To the promise that is so close we can taste it. It’s your choice.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we know that we are children of promise. Help us to believe. And help us to choose well. Amen.