

If you would like to, I invite you to take out the Bibles in the pews in front of you and turn to page 163 in the Pew Bibles, or page 171 in the Large Print Bibles.

While you are doing that, let me say: “What a difference a day can make!” Often we say that to ourselves, as we compare two different days.

- Day 1 might be cold, damp, wet, chilly. Day 2 might be warm, sunny, a light breeze. What a difference a day can make!
- Day 1 might be a day of chores we hate to do: maybe washing the windows. Day 2 might be a day of chores we love to do: like washing the car. What a difference a day can make!

Today in our Message Time we are going to compare two days; two days from way back in the OT; but their message might just be one that we need to hear this week.

If you opened your Bibles, I would like to draw your attention to verse 20 of chapter 30. Halfway through the verse we find these words: “*This is the key to your life.*” [NLT]

That is an absolutely audacious statement. Moses is claiming that what has just been said has the power to be like a key that turns on an engine, or like a key that opens a door, or like a key that unlocks a safety deposit box in which are treasures untold. The phrase in the Bible literally means: “*this is your life.*”

Are you curious? I was when I was reflecting on the Bible texts for this morning.

I have not thought about the keys in my life lately. So I looked through our current collection of keys. Here are some keys I found:

- This key is the ignition key for a car that we have not had for 15 years.
- This key unlocks the front door of our house – at least, the front door we used to have! We replaced that door 6 years ago, and we have new keys.
- This key? I have no idea what this key is for. It locks or unlocks nothing in my current life.

It is important to review the keys in our lives once in a while, to make sure that we still have the ones and are trusting in the ones that actually make a difference.

A day long ago... at a place called Kadesh. It is on the map on the screen.

God has delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. They have seen God's work in the Ten Plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the giving of the 10 Commandments.

So as the Israelites traveled in the wilderness, the key to their life was that God was in it all; in the burning bush and the parting sea and the deliverance from Egypt. God was in it all. That was the key.

On this day the Israelites are at the door of the Promised Land. 12 spies have just returned from checking out the Promised Land...

OK, we need to do an old Sunday School song here. This song tells the story.

12 men went to spy on Canaan, 10 were bad and 2 were good.

What did they see when they spied on Canaan: 10 were bad and 2 were good.

Some saw giants big and tall, some saw grapes in clusters fall,

Some saw God was in it all; 10 were bad and 2 were good.

The 10 spies made a choice that day. The 10 spies chose the bigness of their problems over the faithfulness of their God.

That day they chose – poorly. Some days the only keys we hold onto are the old keys that no longer open anything for us.

Moses said, *"This is the key to your life."* Maybe we have misplaced that key or not been using lately. Maybe we are locked in that place where the bigness of our problems seems greater than the faithfulness of God. Let Moses remind us today of the key to life.

Look at verse 11 in your Bibles.

- Moses says: “*It is not kept in heaven.*” What good is a key if it cannot be reached? If it is too high?
- Moses also says: “*It is not kept beyond the sea.*” What good is a key if it is not in our hands when we need it? If it is too far away?

Many people believed that the key to life is way too high – in heaven. Or way to far away – across the sea.

Look at verse 14 in your Bibles. Moses said: “*The message [the key] is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart...*”

What a promise! The key to your life is near. It is in your heart. God has placed it there.

- Does your heart yearn to be free from sadness? It can be.
- Does your heart desperately worry about your children or your parents? Do you want someone to be with you in those struggles? There is a key that will open that type of help.
- Does your heart break for a broken world? Do you want some guidance in how to care for a broken world? There is a key for that. It is in your heart.

Look at verse 20. Here is the key for a spiritual life blessed by God. The words are in your Bibles and on the screen. Would you read the words out loud with me? “*You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him.*”

Three things in this combination key which opens up our spiritual life. The first is:

- **Love the Lord Your God.**

We have heard that time and again. How do we love the Lord our God? What does it look like to love God? It looks like these three things:

1. Reflect the grace of God back to God. Treat God the way God treats you. That is what we do in worship. God never takes your name in vain, God never neglects

to meet with you and say a good word to you, God never bears false witness against you.

2. Apply the grace of God to friends and family. If we love God we will also love God's family. It is such a joy to watch this congregation gather before and after worship and treat each other with respect and kindness and care. We love God by loving God's people.
 3. Extend the grace of God to outsiders. I love to play softball in the summer on our Church team. The reason is because it seems like half of our team were not members last year. But we extended welcomes and now these new friends are there, and this year they are there with new babies! Emma and Maggie have been at games. And I wonder who the new people we will welcome this year will be, and if they can play softball!
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Love the Lord your God opens up our spiritual life. And another key combination which unlocks our life:

- **Obey the Lord your God.**

Wow, good Lutherans, that sounds like works righteousness. Well, yes and no. Think of it like a river we are crossing. It is a wide river and a raging river and a deep river.

We have no tools to build a bridge with. No saws and no nails and no hammers and no trees. There is no way we can cross that river on our own power and strength. No way! Say it with me: No way!

But the bridge builder comes by. He has built a bridge that safely carries us to the other side. That is God's way. Say it with me: God's way!

Once we are safely on the other side, Jesus gives us tools to use on the kingdom side. Paul calls them the fruits of the Spirit: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."* [Galatians 5:22-23]

We are called to use these gifts on the kingdom side. And the more we use them, the more our life is unlocked and opened up to the presence of our God.

Look at little Maggie Jean... She could do nothing to come into God's presence. But she was invited to come, and she was brought by her parents and family and friends.

Now she is on the kingdom side, and Jesus will give her gifts. All Jesus asks is that she uses those gifts. Obey the Lord your God, and our spiritual life opens up.

▪ **Commit to the Lord your God.**

Another translation says "cleave" to the Lord your God, and yet another says "hold fast." Hold fast to what?

Time and again people wish for something to hold onto when life begins to swirl and foundations begin to sink. We are invited to hold fast to our committed God and what is important to our God.

A ship was caught in a storm. The ship could not fight the huge waves, and it was being pushed into a rocky shore.

The captain let down an anchor, but the wind blew so fiercely that the anchor simply dragged along the sandy bottom.

The ship was drifting nearer and nearer the shore and soon would be ruined on the rocks. There was one little anchor left. The captain was sure it would not hold, but he was desperate. The little anchor was let down and, to the captain's surprise, the chain tightened. The little anchor held fast, and rode out the storm.

When the anchors were lifted, the big one came up easily for it had not held fast to anything.

But the little anchor... They pulled and pulled and at last it came up - little by little. It was so heavy! When the little anchor broke out of the sea it was holding fast to an

absolutely huge anchor! The little anchor had caught in the ring of the anchor of a great battleship that had been lost there years before. That was how the little anchor was able to ride out the storm.

If you still have your Bibles open, look at verse 15. It says, *“Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death.”*

What a difference a day makes! You may have come today a little weary, a little shaken, a little uncertain, a little stressed. God today has this gift for you: it is called life.

God is always about life. Jesus said, *“I have come to give you life and give you life more abundantly.”* Jesus said, *“I am the bread of life. I am the water of life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am everlasting life.”*

God’s love of life is found in the first pages of the Bible where we read about the Garden of Eden. And God’s love of life is found in the last pages of Scripture, where we read about the eternal city and the river of life and the tree of life.

God is always for life. And this day, this Lord’s day – what a difference a day can make. Let’s choose life. Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, you have carried us over the river to a new life. May we this day choose to love you, to obey your plans, and to cling to you when life gets tough. Amen.