



“Live and prosper.”

You know where this line is from. One of my favorite shows growing up was the original *Star Trek* with Leonard Nimoy as Spock. Whenever he said this phrase my seven-year-old mind (I was watching reruns) was entranced by this pinnacle of profundity.

As I was reading Deuteronomy this week, Spock's saying once again came to mind. Phrases like, “life and prosperity”, and “choose life that you may live” evoked memories of Spock’s most famous and utterly earnest desire for others to live an abundant life.

But Moses does not just wish them long life and prosperity. He gives them a list of instructions. A really long list – 613 commandments long!

Biblically then a prosperous life is not defined by what is in the garage or the bank account but what is in your heart and your mind. True life is defined by living within the will of God. The Ten Commandments are not so much a list of dos and don’ts but a prescription for prosperous living.

Granted sometimes the prescriptions do feel like they suck out life. Don't eat doughnuts, do eat Fiber One Cereal, don't stay up too late, do run 3 miles a day. It is the choice between a life of wholeness and the life of immediate gratification. It can be very hard to resist the

temptation and so Jesus has some rather harsh examples to drive home the importance of a right heart and mind. As He spoke to the crowds during the sermon on the mount, like Moses, He gave them a prescription for living.

“If you say ‘you fool, you idiot, you loser’, you are liable to the Hell of fire.” Well, you bring the hot dogs and I’ll bring the burgers because we are all going to the eternal fiery barbecue. Jesus’ hyperbole is meant for us to consider the true nature of sin. It's not about a list of picayune rules that God has created merely to be strict. They are meant to be a guide on how to love.

Hateful anger is equated with murder and lust with adultery because they all treat with disdain God’s beloved children. Calling someone a fool and really meaning it is essentially calling a person worthless, but all people are made by God. So, if you call a person worthless you not only insult that person but God as well.

Sometimes we can be driven mad trying to avoid temptation. In fact, an ancient theologian named Origen is said to have taken Jesus words, “If your right eye causes you to sin pluck it out,” literally when he castrated himself.

But Jesus did not mean this literally any more than he meant we could magically move

Bear Mountain with faith. It is really impossible to perfect ourselves in this lifetime, but there is something we can do. Avoid the places of temptation and try to right the wrongs we have committed. The point of Jesus' extreme examples is found in verse 24 – before you go to God, be reconciled to those you have wronged.

God is not the absolution machine. You can't do whatever you want to your neighbor and then expect God to be the ticket to release you.

Several years ago, our country was riveted by a YouTube video, posted by Matthew Cordle, a 22-year-old young man who became intoxicated and killed Vincent Canzani in a car accident.

In the video He said, "Whatever my sentence may be, there's no fair sentence when it comes to the loss of a life." Cordle apologized to his family. "It should have been me that night, the guilty party, instead of an innocent man," he said. [New York Post] Cordle realized that it's not just about serving his time but about mending broken relationships. He had the courage to offer it not knowing whether or not the family would accept it.

True life is living in harmony. The Deuteronomy and Matthew passages are less about sin and law as they are about carving out a path for right relationships with self, neighbor, and God.

Moses stood on the brink of the Promised Land. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and several hundred more years of slavery back in Egypt he desperately wanted the people to get it right. So, he gives them

these laws as his last will and testament as a gift to the people he loves so much and is so utterly frustrated with! He reminds them what they have been through – slavery, plagues crossing the Red Sea, dehydration and near starvation and Angels of Death!

He says, "I have set before you life and prosperity or death and adversity." In essence he is asking "Which will you choose?"

He reminded the people that as slaves in Egypt they knew what it was like for some to prosper and others to be treated like animals, so he lays out some provisions to protect those on the margins of society...

...giving generously to the poor (15:11)

...a justice system that does not favor the privileged (16:18)

...hospitality to runaway slaves (23:15)

...paying fair wages to the poor (24:14)

...and leaving part of the harvest for those who need it (Brett Younger)

In *Star Trek* Spock was meant to epitomize the life that was not lived for self but others, as he said, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of a few."

Of course, it was most touching when he was with Captain Kirk. When he said those words and held his hand just so you always had the sense of a deep respect from Spock, a sense of profound well-wishing for his friend Kirk, a bond of friendship that had seen a tremendous amount of hardship and testing. In the same way Moses with the people of Israel had this testing and he wants nothing more for Israel –

the baby he carried all that way to thrive to excel, to live long and abundantly in the land, o, the land, they had waited so long for.

It is the same aching yearning we have for our country. To live in harmony with each other. To find forgiveness and to extend it to others. To heal the rifts and to work toward the prospering of all people.

And Leonard Nimoy being Jewish was more tied to Deuteronomy than we think. Perhaps even more famous than his saying, "Live long and prosper" was the gesture that went along with it. Yonassan Gershom, in his book *Jewish Themes in Star Trek*, explains the origin of that symbol.

The Vulcan greeting is based upon a blessing gesture used by the *kohanim* (modern day descendants of Jewish priests). The actual blessing is done with both arms held horizontally in front, at shoulder level, with hands touching, to form the Hebrew letter "shin." This stands for the Hebrew word for "Shaddai", meaning "Almighty [God]." Like most Jewish children, young Leonard Nimoy could not contain his curiosity about what the kohanim were really doing up there in front of the congregation.

He writes in his autobiography, *I am Spock*:

The special moment when the Kohanim blessed the assembly moved me... I had heard that this indwelling Spirit of God was too powerful, too beautiful, too awesome for any mortal to look upon and survive, and so I

obediently covered my face with my hands. But of course, I had to peek.

Leonard survived his peeking unscathed and saw the kohanim extending their fingers in the mystical "shin" gesture. That magical moment remained with him for life, and was there to draw upon years later, when he invented the Vulcan salute.

When I watched this gesture as a child it seemed to me to be the deepest expression of the human heart for another to live a blessed life filled with the good things and not harm. We have a part to play to live according to God's commands, but we also have a part to play in ensuring the long life and prosperity of all.

Amen.