

“Teach Them to Your Children”

Deut. 6:1-9, Proper 17-B, Rally Day, Aug. 30, 2015

Students in a journalism class at USC or Clemson still learn today that the first paragraph of **every news article** should answer those **five** all-important **questions: “Who, what, where, when and why!”**

Similarly, in the opening words of the **Book of Deuteronomy**, the **Prophet Moses** is also answering these five all-important questions for us and for anyone who might one day read his book too! **Who?** The Prophet Moses! **What?** The Prophet Moses is now addressing that second generation of the children of Israel! **Where?** At a place called **Kadesh-Barnea** on the eastern side of the Jordan River. **When?** Just before that second generation of Israelites is getting ready now, at long last, to cross over the Jordan River under the leadership of Joshua into the **Promised Land!** **Why?** So that this second generation of the Hebrew people would not be found guilty of committing the same sins of idolatry that their parents and grandparents had committed during their 40 years of their wilderness wanderings and end up, in the process also, forfeiting so many of the great blessings that the LORD God had awaiting them in the Promised Land.

Moses says, ***“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me: (1) To teach you, that (2) You may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess it!”***

The Bible teaches us very clearly that the only way that any of us can ever come **to know the true God, and to know him personally and intimately, is because of his self-revelation to us in the gift of his Word.**

Here Moses states that he was in possession of ***“the commandment,”*** that is, of ***“all the statutes and rules of the LORD God,”*** only because the LORD God almighty had revealed these to Moses many years ago by the power of his Spirit atop Mount Sinai.

But it wasn’t enough for Moses to fulfill his calling as a prophet of God that he merely be in possession of the Word of God himself. No! “To prophesy” means primarily to ***“speak forth”*** the Word of God to other people. Therefore, Moses was required to teach God’s Word faithfully and publically to God’s adopted people!

Here Moses is reminding us that he was required to teach the revealed Word of God to God’s people with two important goals in mind. The first one is so that the hearers of God’s Word themselves might learn to properly fear God, and the second goal is that they might learn to instill this same proper fear of God into the lives of their children.

Three times throughout the Bible we read: ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom!” (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, Psalm 111:10)***

Do you remember what Jesus said along these same lines one day, when he was about to send his 12 disciples out on their first missionary journey? Jesus said, “What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do

not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul! Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell!" (Matthew 10:27-28)

Brothers and sisters, even though God has the power to bring his judgment upon us and the whole human race because of our sins, in his great love, he uses his almighty power instead to redeem us and to save us from our sins! That's why the Apostle John one day wrote, **"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17)!**

And God has some powerful expectations for those who are privileged enough to hear and believe the Word of God. Not only are we to fear the LORD our God ourselves, but we are also to instill this proper kind of fear of the good LORD into our children and our grandchildren also!

"Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach to you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God; you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long!"

It's here that we are reminded that of all the Ten Commandments, it is the fourth one that has a powerful promise attached to it. People who seek to live in godly obedience to their mother and father, and in obedience to all authority figures that God has placed over them in their lives, will have a much greater chance of living a long life upon this earth versus those who do not. For example, those drive down the Interstate Highway while sober, observing the speed limit with their seat belts buckled, have a much greater chance of living a longer life on this earth, than those who are intoxicated, who are far exceeding the speed limit, and who are not wearing their seatbelts either!

Children are to obey their parents, their school teachers, their Sunday school teachers, and law enforcement people whom God has placed in authority over them in their lives! -- But let me remind you that at this particular period in the history of Israel, most did not have any kind of strong belief in a future resurrection of the dead and of the promise of eternal life as you and I celebrate that again today, as those who are privileged to live on this side of the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Nevertheless, years later before Jesus was born into this world, there were some branches of Judaism, like the **Pharisees**, who did come to believe in a future physical resurrection of the dead and life after death; though the **Sadducees** did not, which is why my Sunday school teacher taught me many, many years ago—that they were sad, you see!

At this time in Israel's history, the people of God were prone, much more, to seeing their own lives being extended in this world, even beyond death, through the lives of their children and grandchildren! Again Moses commands: **"Hear, therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey!" (V. 3)** But receiving this new life from God, not only with the desire to live in obedience to God's commandments, and also thereby having **the power to live to a large degree in obedience to God's commandments** is something that only comes to us through our faithful hearing of the Word of God.

Next, Moses speaks to this second generation of Israelites, about ready to cross the Jordan River and to enter into the Promised Land one of the most important verses in all of the Old Testament, as far as the people of Israel were concerned. ***“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”***

These words are known as the **“Shema”** because **“shema” is the Hebrew word here that is translated in its imperative form as “hear!”** ***“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”*** When you stop and think about it, my brothers and sisters, this really was an extremely radical statement that the Prophet Moses was making that day to that second generation of Israelites; now just some **two weeks before his death, and only a few days before that appointed time when, at long last, the people of Israel would finally cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land.** Why? Because we often forget that the children of Israel, at this time, was living in a world that was, for the most part, a very polytheistic world; a world in which the people who lived in the neighboring nations all around them professed faith, not just in one God, but in **many different gods.** So it certainly was an ominous statement that Moses was making here: ***“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might!”***

The Hebrew people not only dared to say **that there was only one true God, their God, but also that their God is the One who has made this world and everything and everyone in it! And this was a radical claim for sure!** Like the people of Israel, we Christians claim to be monotheists also; people who believe that there is only one true God. But saying that and living out its implications in our daily lives may be two very different things entirely!

There was a time in that ancient world, when many people throughout the world treated their gods the way that we do our electrical appliances today—they had a different God for each purpose. Just as we have one kind of appliance to **wash our dirty dishes and dry them,** and a distinctly different electrical appliance to **wash our clothes,** and a distinctly different appliance to **dry our clothes,** and one to make our **coffee,** and another to **toast our bread**—people in what we would have regarded as pagan cultures—had many different gods that they believed in; one for every occasion!

People in the surrounding nations believed in many different gods, so that when you moved from one land to another, you did not just get a transfer of membership from one church to another, but **from one god to another. And you had better well have taken your loyalty oath to that new god in the new land seriously,** if you truly wanted “fit in” and to be accepted in that new region of the world where you were now living!

Do you remember the story of **Ruth and her supreme devotion to her mother-in-law Naomi** after both of their husbands had died? Ruth was a native of Moab, where Naomi’s husband **Elimelech** and their two sons, **Mahlon and Chilion** had actually immigrated, because of a severe drought taking place back in Bethlehem of Israel. But unfortunately, her husband Elimelech and their two sons all ended up dying, leaving these three women as widows in Moab. The two sons had married two **Moabite women: Orpah and Ruth.** When Naomi decides it is time for her to head back to Bethlehem, Ruth vows to go with her because of her great love for Naomi. Then she says: ***“Where you go, I will go, where you lodge, I will lodge, and your people shall be my people and your God, my God!” (Ruth 1:16).*** Ruth decides to become a convert to Judaism not only because of her love for her mother-in-law, but also because that was the only acceptable and respectable thing to do!

In the a world where many different peoples espoused their beliefs in a whole different lottery of gods, it took a man with a great deal of personal courage and faith to say what Moses is stating out loud here: ***“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”***

As Christians we profess our belief that there is only one true God as well, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, **whom we by the grace of God have come to know also because this God is the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!** We call him the “Triune” God because he is One Divine Being in three distinct Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit!”

How easy it is for any of us, as Pastor Wilson cautioned us last Sunday, of being guilty of giving our God lip service, and lip service alone! Is the God of the Bible truly our God?

Well if he is, then Moses goes on to tell us that the proof is in the pudding! If he is really your God, then you and I are to: **“Love the LORD our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might!” (Deuteronomy 6:6)**

Here Moses is teaching us that if we really love the Triune God then our whole being should leap out of ourselves, at times, in our worship and devotion to him! Our love for God must involve the totality of our being—of our inner selves, the way that King David says in Psalm 103, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and let all that is within me, bless his holy name!”

We still need to sing with the hymn-writer of old: “Thee will I love, my strength, my tower; thee will I love my hope, my joy! Thee will I love with all my power, with ardor time can never destroy! Thee will I love, O Light divine, so long as life is mine!” (LSB 694:1)

And yet, isn’t it interesting that when Jesus quoted this commandment from Deuteronomy 6 one day in response to someone’s question: **“What is the greatest commandment?”** that Jesus added one more dimension in calling for a total response from us to love God! Jesus said this is the greatest commandment: **“You are to love the LORD your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and with all of your mind!” (Mark 12:30)**

And isn’t this what you and I are doing whenever we take time out of our busy lives to read the Word of God, to read the Bible on our own, to read a devotional book, or attend a Bible study where the Word of God is being taught by someone well-acquainted with it, and by gathering together to worship, the way that many of you are doing so, I am sure, here again today!

Then Moses says: “You are to teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise! You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates!” (Vv. 7-9) -- Moses was saying to this second generation of Israelites, now ready to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land, that when they actually got there, the parents were to diligently teach the “commandment,” that is, “the statutes and rules” of God’s Word to their children, so that the Word of God might come to fully one day genuinely guide them in every department of their lives!

In the days of Christ, the Jewish people literally put Moses’ other commands here into practice in their daily lives! They would write out Scripture verses on small pieces of paper, and place them in little containers they called **“phylacteries”** attached to a string around their foreheads, and sometimes also on their left arm (Matthew 23:5). **They also attached a small container containing Old Testament passages to their front door and on every door in the house.** Each occupant was to reverently touch the container every time they passed through a door (Psalm 121:8). It was a sign that the house was to be a sanctuary for the Lord and a place where the Word of God, was taught, loved and obeyed!

We Christians today don't use phylacteries, but hopefully we do have our own religious symbols, Christian art and the like to hopefully help hold God's Word close to us that should remind us always to remember God's mercies. To recall the great sacrifice of Jesus, we use the symbol of the cross in our homes and on our clothing, or wear it as a necklace. This is a silent testimony that we are disciples of the Savior, who was crucified and raised to life for our sake. But just think how blest we all are to have not just one copy, but usually several copies of the Bible in our homes, so that we can read and study God's covenantal promises to us and to all the world in Jesus Christ, his Son, our Savior still today!

We can buy Christian books and watch movies about the lives of God's people some who lived during the days of the Bible, while others have lived in much more recent days, to allow ourselves and to build up one another in the faith as well! **BUT TO ALL OF THESE WE NEED TO ADD OUR OWN PERSONAL WITNESS OF OUR LIPS AND LIVES. WE NEED TO HELP ONE ANOTHER REALIZE THAT THIS GOD WHOM WE SAY WE LOVE IS FOR REAL, AND THAT HOPEFULLY, HE TRULY IS, NUMBER ONE IN OUR HEART OF HEARTS OURSELVES!**

In closing, you probably know that two of our former American presidents were in the national news recently, both men being 90 years old. President Jimmy Carter, our 39th president, announced to his Bible class that he has taught for many years now in Plains, Georgia that the cancer he has been battling has unfortunately now made its way into his brain. But when he made that announcement as it was also captured on film for television and for the Internet, many people were extremely impressed by the great calmness of his demeanor and manner of doing so. Surely, President Carter demonstrated in those moments that he was very much in possession of *"the peace of God that surpasses all understanding"* (Philippians 4:7).

And then President George Herbert Walker Bush, our 41st president, unfortunately had fallen in his home and broken a bone in his neck. He was hospitalized for several days, but is not at home once again.

I read recently that the older President Bush, not 43 but 41, as he is sometimes affectionately referred to today was one day asked what he regarded to be the greatest accomplishment in his whole life. And just think of all the accomplishments that he could have named in response to that question! President Bush might have mentioned **his success a Navy Pilot during World War II**; or called to mind his **8 years as Vice President under Ronald Reagan**. He might have mentioned **his own successful presidency**, or made reference to the years he served as the **head of the CIA**, or as the **U.S. Ambassador to China**. He could have bragged about his success during **Operation Desert Storm**. But, when answering this question, President Bush revealed his heart as well as his priorities, once again, when he said: **"My greatest accomplishment is that my children still come to see me."**

I am glad that today is once again **SUNDAY SCHOOL RALLY DAY**. Wouldn't it be great if 50 years from now, provided that our Lord Jesus Christ had not yet returned for his saints in glory, the people of Mount Olive Lutheran Church, in Irmo, SC were asked: "What is your greatest accomplishment?" that the greatest collective answer of all would be: **"Our greatest accomplishment is that our children still come to see us! Amen**