

April 14, 2019
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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PROMISED BLESSING
Deuteronomy 30

People who claim no religious affiliation is now the largest segment of our culture. The Pew Research Group has concluded on the basis of the most recent surveys that the people group who does not identify with any religion as well as the groups who have abandoned belief in God have exploded. Thirty-four percent of Americans now claim to have no religion. That is contrasted with 25% who identify themselves as evangelicals and 14% who identify with one of the mainline protestant denominations.

I am not surprised at all by these numbers. The evidence that God's people are virtually without impact in our culture has been obvious for a generation. An astonishing number of the 25% of the population who claim to be evangelicals are virtually illiterate concerning knowledge of the gospel and Bible knowledge generally. And the numbers are worse for identifiers with mainline denominations.

The God-denying liberal politicians, media, and educational system have accomplished the larger portion of their goals. All that is left is to completely silence the few voices who still believe in God, the ones who try to live out the principles of His Word. The results are telling. Crime is rampant throughout the nation. We cannot listen to the news without daily hearing about murder, theft, and corruption on the local level. Things are infinitely worse in the big cities. More people are murdered in our large cities daily than die in our embattled armies in the enemy's territory. Divorce and dysfunctional families have eroded the future for America. Internet traffic flow is heavy at the liberal news media sites, the dark entertainment sites, and traffic at pornographic sites eclipses all other sites. Porn sites on the internet have more activity than Amazon, Netflix, and Twitter combined. It is estimated that over 30% of the

internet is pornographic. That is the evil and death that comes from forsaking God.

Because our culture is fully immersed in sin, we have become a very sad and frustrated people. The saddest reality is that this deplorable condition has overtaken a culture that once revered God, loved the Bible, established churches and Christian colleges and sent missionaries to the "heathen" by the thousands. We have abandoned God and sin has filled the void. And the more we sin, the heavier God's hand of judgment against us will become. Does anyone other than me wish for a revival not only in the nation but in our own souls?

This was the warning Moses left with the people of Israel. As we finished our study in chapter 29 last week, we were struck with two certainties. One was the sad reality that the nation of God's people would forsake Him and He would judge them just like He promised. *"Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as they are this day"* (Deuteronomy 29:27-28).

The second certainty was, *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law"* (Deuteronomy 29:29). One of those amazing secret things is described in detail in chapter thirty. Yes, Israel would forsake God, experience His judgment, and be scattered across the face of the earth. But God in His mercy would forgive their sins, restore them to the Promised Land, and bless them abundantly.

Now here is the great secret that is revealed but hard to understand. God is not finished with Israel. That is a point of division among sincere Christian people. If we relegate the many statements of this chapter to pictures, types, and analogies, we can fairly conclude that God has no future plans for His people. However, if we interpret the promises found here literally and take them at face value, the nation of God's people has a glorious future ahead. Longing for God to fulfill all the promises that He has made to me about eternity, I am biased in favor of allowing God's promises to Israel to stand.

An Incredible Promise (vv.1-10).

The incredible promise is that God's people will return. Return from where? Part of God's promise involves the fact that His people would be scattered. *"And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you"* (v.1).

After the scattering, God's promised blessing was certain to come upon His people because He was fulfilling His promise. God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob a rich land, flowing with milk and honey, a land where His people could be prosperous. God promised that, because of His blessing, the ground, the cattle, the flocks, the herds would produce abundantly (28:3). All their enemies would be defeated (28:7). God promised to bless every effort they put their hands to (28:8). The blessings would literally "overtake" the people (28:2). Thinking about all the wonderful blessings is encouraging.

But notice that the curses were also certain. The promised curses would come because of disobedience, a slack relationship with God (28:15-68). Pain and suffering would not be coincidental, but rather would be the hand of God literally arranging bad circumstances against His own people. Ultimately, God would scatter His people among the pagan nations. God promised it – it was going to happen!

How sad must be the things God knows about His people. He has made us His very own having purchased us through the blood of His beloved Son. He has shown us what is good and how we should live. He has promised to bless us with all the spiritual blessings that can be found in Christ. But He has also promised to chasten His children, judge His people, even to the point of death if we stubbornly resist His will. How incredibly sad that our loving Heavenly Father watches us day by day, observes a heart cold toward Him, sees us walking a path toward heartache and destruction, and knowing that we are walking into His promised punishment.

And yet, God's people will return. *"And return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul"* (v.1). Still God pleads for His people to turn. To turn around is to repent. God pleads with us to repent and begin obeying His voice which we hear in His commands (v.2). Real obedience is with the entire being (heart and soul)

(v.2). Obedience flows out of a love for God, which means He is our primary focus.

But why would a rebel against God turn around and go back to Him? What would possibly cause the change in thinking? *"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live"* (v.6). Sometimes we need to confront friends and loved ones about sin like God's prophets confronted His people about their backsliding lifestyles. Sometimes we need to remind people of God's commands that reflect His character. But all the time we need to beg God to interrupt the lives of our friends and loved ones and circumcise their hearts because that is the only means by which they can turn around. Sin that enslaves, sin that people crave becomes less of an issue and quite unimportant when God miraculously cuts it away from His people. Pray for God to make us love Him!

And when we turn, God restores. It is *then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers* (vv.3-5).

How amazing that while God restores His people who repent and turn back to Him, at the very same time He promised vengeance against His enemies. *"And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you"* (v.7). The Bible history as well as secular history is full of evidence that all kinds of people persecute God's people. They do it because they can't persecute God. The foes of God's people are the foes of God. They, being born in sin and being unrepentant, offend God every day with their sins. Because they reject the kindness and the merciful invitation from God to come to Him, they deserve the curses.

But is not the people of God who are responsible to level vengeance against the enemy. God will repay. Again, it is not that the foes of God's people will accidentally have bad days in a row. Rather, according to God's sovereign choice and in His perfect timing, the foes of God's people will reap His vengeance. Ultimately, that is the story of

the Revelation. The same story is laid down in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and most of the Minor prophets. God is going to restore His people and, at the same time, judge all sinners.

The promises of God's blessing for His people and judgment for the enemy are all based on obedience. It is refreshing to hear that God's people will obey. "*And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today*" (v.8). Also in verse ten we read, "*When you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul*" (vv.10). What wonderful news it is that God's people will return to Him and obey Him fully.

How will they turn to the Lord with all their hearts? God is going to do the miracle of regeneration to them. In the context of Jeremiah teaching the people about an amazing day when God promised to bring His people back to the land, to bless them abundantly, when the people will rejoice, Jeremiah gave the reason for this amazing change: "*But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*" (vv.33,34).

Paul described that same miracle like this: *And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"* (Romans 11:26).

The text states so obviously that God will bless. *The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers* (v.9). This kind of restoration has not happened yet. This is not a description of the remnant being repatriated to the land under Ezra and Nehemiah. God's timing is far different from ours. "*In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,*" says the LORD, *your Redeemer* (Isaiah 54:8).

A Known Commandment (vv.11-14).

The commandment is not hard to find. The focus is on "this" commandment. "*For this commandment that I command you today*" (v.11a). In the Hebrew text the phrase *this commandment* is actually, *the word*. It is a reference to all that Moses has spoken in Deuteronomy. The wording rather reminds us of Jesus's reply to the lawyer that all the commands (all the law) is summed up in this a simple statement posed by a man who should know. "*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*" *And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:36-39).

The command is not a mystery. Moses assured God's people that the commandment "*is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'"* (vv.11b-13). God stated His character revealed in His law plainly at Mt. Sinai. God gave Moses the statements etched in stone. Moses taught, reaffirmed, reiterated the "commandment" in this setting. God required His people to repeat it annually in public reading.

Likewise God still reveals His character in His law. He reveals it in creation by writing it on our consciences and, of course, it is recorded in the Bible. You almost have to work hard not to come face to face with the commandment. That is because the word is near. "*But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it*" (v.14). The command is especially near to God's people. We hear it reiterated every Lord's day. We should be accessing it every day. We should be talking about it. The word is in our mouths because it is in our hearts. Jesus taught, "*The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks*" (Luke 6:45).

And this word can be done. Moses taught that the commandment is near *so that you can do it*. If the command is in our heart, we can do

it. We can do what we should do because God the Holy is within us strengthening us.

An Eternal Choice (vv.15-20).

Love God and be blessed. That is a simple rule. God makes the rules. “*See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil*” (v.15). This the choice of the ages, the choice of eternity. There is no possible way to escape making the choice. To reject life and good is to choose death and evil. The warning could not possibly be more poignant. It is not a one-time choice but an ongoing choice. Salvation is actually not our choice as much as it is God’s choice of us. But being born again, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, familiar with God’s Word, we make the choice every day to pursue life and good or death and evil. While we will not be condemned for eternity, we can chase after things and ideas that will land us in spiritual deadness and all kinds of evil.

So the best choice is to obey God. Have you ever tried that? It is difficult to be consistent to say the least. How does it work? The short answer given here is that we obey God by loving Him. “*If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it*” (v.16).

What could be simpler than that. We obey God by loving God. To attempt to obey God without loving Him is to place more responsibility on the human nature than it can bear. None of us has the ability to show complete obedience to God in our own strength. But when we keep our hearts in fellowship with Him, when we love Him with all our hearts, obeying is what comes naturally, not what we work at.

The wrong option is to turn from God and perish. That rule presents a potential problem. “*But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them*” (v.17). The real being, the heart, is distracted by sin and passing stuff. When the heart turns from God, it becomes dull of hearing. When we no longer hear God, we are so easily drawn aside to other gods. When other gods have our attention, we serve them.

Hence Solomon’s warning to Rehoboam. *Guard your heart more than anything else, because the source of your life flows from it (Proverbs 4:23 GWV)*. Read the history of the kings over God’s people and you quickly realize that Prince Rehoboam never got what his dad tried to teach him.

God is our witness regarding our choice. “*I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse*” (vv.18-19a). Heaven and earth witness to the extreme, incomparable blessing of life God has given us. Heaven and earth also witness our dullness, our impudence toward God and His blessings.

So the end challenge is for us to choose life. We are wise to choose to live. “*Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live*” (v.19b). Choose to live abundantly with our hearts fixed on God. Remember that, according to Moses’s solemn warning, your choice affects your children. John Freeman tells of a woman’s confession to him at a seminar. “I recently had to ask my husband of twenty years to leave our home due to an unrepented and, therefore, undealt-with pornography problem. Our twenty-year-old son called us this week from another state to tell us he’s gay. Our sixteen-year-old daughter has been in counseling for some time now for cutting and self-mutilation, after frequenting some very explicit cyber-sex sites for several years. It had become an overwhelming secret in her life and she just didn’t know how to handle the shame, guilt, and feelings of being out of control with it. Then, just recently, my brother’s wife left him to pursue a lesbian relationship with another woman. Sexual sin and brokenness of one type or another has impacted every significant relationship in my life.” (John Freeman, *Hide or Seek*, Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2014, pp.1,2)

To choose to live is to choose to love. Moses told the people to chose life, “*loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them*” (vv.19b-20). We choose life by loving the Lord our God. We hold fast to Him. He is our life and length of days.