



Deuteronomy 14:1-2
Don't Mourn Like Those With No Hope

NKJ Deuteronomy 14:1 "You are the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead.

2 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Here we have several words by which the special nature of Israel among all the other nations is set before them. First they are called in verse 1 *the children of Yahweh*. They are also *Bachar – Chosen* to be God's *qodosh am – His holy people* – they are set apart for his use. They are also his *segullah* – his treasured possession.

Segullah is a word used in the bible to denote the treasure of kings but as John Curid points out, ***“whereas earthly kings have treasuries that hold gold and silver, Yahweh’s storehouse is filled with His elect people.”*** Moses starts out by reminding God’s people how special they are, and why they were special. It was because they were chosen by God, elected not because of any good works they had done, or because they were great, but because God loved them. God himself chose them to be His beloved sons, not because *He* had to have children, but because they were orphans in need of a father. So He adopted them, He took away their rags and the chains that had kept them in bondage and gave them the title and the robes and the right of His sons. They were chosen and set apart, designed to be people who are *Holy unto the Lord* and it was His desire that they would dwell in His house not for a time, but for all eternity. As David expressed in the closing of Psalm 23 ***“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.”***

It is often the case that a Christian parent will remind a child to act in a way that shows that they were raised in a Christian family, and that if they will not others will see and it will reflect badly on them. If they do not see Christian behavior, they will have no reason to suspect that such a child knows the Lord: ***Proverbs 20:11 Even a child is known by his deeds, Whether what he does is pure and right.***

This morning we saw how Jesus confirmed that the way people acted, their deeds, showed which family they were part of, whether that was the family of God or the family of the devil. Now in this chapter Israel is reminded of the need to act in keeping with their calling, They are not strangers and aliens, they are part of God’s family, He adopted them, they are his *most* treasured possession. So how they act, how they dress, the things they said and did should reflect that fact and show what they believed.

In the modern world we can occasionally see people showing their religious beliefs by the way they dress, if they have saffron robes and shaved heads and you're in the airport, you probably have a Hare Krishna, if you have a Turban on an Indian man, you probably have a Sikh, and so on. So too in the ancient world, there were distinctive ways of dressing, and tattooing, and scarring, and cutting hair that showed that a person was a follower of a false god.

Cutting yourself so that you would bleed was a part of heathen worship, it was hoped that by shedding your own blood the deities would be prompted to intercede for you. We see this, for instance, in the great contest between Elijah and the Prophets of Baal on the slopes of Mt. Carmel.

1 Kings 18:27 And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened."

28 So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.

29 And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.

Elijah mocks their so-called god, and they become all the more frenzied. But their actions were vain, because as the text points out, there was no one there to answer their cries to respond to their self-mutilation. Baal did not exist. So there was no answer, no one to pay attention.

Interestingly enough there are some religions that still practice cutting themselves. For instance the Shi'ites during the festival of Ashoura that commemorates the death of Ali they will cut themselves with swords and flog themselves until they bleed.

The children of God are to have nothing to do with this practice. I love Matthew Henry's comment here, "***Methinks this is like a parent's change to his little children, that are foolish, careless, and wilful, and are apt to play with knives: Children, you shall not cut yourselves.***" The body is God's and is to be used for him, when we disfigure ourselves, we are unlawfully vandalizing his creation. And we are forbidden to unlawfully shed blood, even our own. As God reminds Noah in enacting capital punishment for murder in Gen. 9:6 – "***Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.***"

Then there was the cutting of the hair of the head. By this disfiguring action, the heathens showed that they were in mourning, and they believed that the ghosts of the deceased watched to make sure they were the object of strenuous lamentation. Literally they believed that if you didn't grieve sufficiently for the dead, you were in danger of being haunted by them.

Therefore they must not follow these practices, because they are not followers of these false gods, and are not to look or act like the worshipers of false gods

But there is another reason we should not grieve like the pagans with an excessive grief, namely because they grieve as those who have no hope. We are supposed to be the children of life and to remember that if we have been united to God by Faith Alone in Christ we will never be separated from Him. While for the unbeliever death is passing into a state of eternal misery and corruption, death for the believer in Christ is but a passing through the veil into eternal life. As the saying goes, ***BORN ONCE DIE TWICE, BORN TWICE, DIE ONCE.***

Now although the separation that believers experience is temporary, and we know that death is not the end but the beginning of eternal life. We should still grieve at death, we need to remember that death is wrong, death is the wages of sin, it is something that has come in as a result of the curse. It tears apart families separates husbands from wives, parents from children, friend from friend, and we should grieve over it. Let us never forget that Jesus wept over the death of his friend Lazarus, even though he was about to raise him from the dead! I stress this because there is an odd strain in modern evangelicalism that says we shouldn't grieve at the "home-going" of a loved one but rather when we lose a loved one we must repress our natural pain and put on fake smile. In seminary a friend of mine and one of his friends was killed by a drunk driver, both of them were young men with large families, and I still remember to this day the wrongness that I felt at their funeral where the pastor kept saying we aren't grieving we are celebrating. *Celebrating?* From now till the day they die or Jesus comes back those young women will never again see their husbands, those children will never again be able to hug their fathers. It was odd, the only note that broke the celebration was the unbelieving inner-city girls basketball team they had coached was there and wailing, they were grieving as those who had no hope, but at least they had the sense to GRIEVE. ***Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.***

So we grieve, but how we grieve is important. Turn in your bibles to 1 Thess. 4:13. Paul was concerned that the Christian community would remember this, and as a result not fall into the inordinate grief of the pagans at the loss their loved ones. So he wrote:

1 Thess. 4:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Jesus corrected the Saducees who did not believe in the resurrection or eternal life that the Saints who are God's precious treasure when they are united to Him are never parted from him:

Matt. 22:32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.'

We must remember that while we grieve, we know that we have hope in Christ: Matthew Henry wrote:

"It is an excellent passage which Mr. Ainsworth here quotes from one of the Jewish writers, who understands this as a law against immoderate grief for the death of our relations. If your father (for instance) die, you shall not cut yourselves, that is, you shall not sorrow more than is meet, for you are not fatherless, you have a Father, who is great, living, and permanent, even the holy blessed God, whose children you are, v. 1. But an infidel (says he), when his father dies, hath no father that can help him in time of need; for he hath said to a stock, Thou art my father, and to a stone, Thou

hast brought me forth (Jer. 2:27); therefore he weeps, cuts himself, and makes himself bald. We that have a God to hope in, and a heaven to hope for, must bear up ourselves with that hope under every burden of this kind.”

A few applications:

Christians How do you look what does your outward appearance say about the family you belong to? – Does your dress indicate that you are a follower of the living God or do you dress like a pagan? More important than how we dress, how do you look?

We can often go about visibly looking like those that have no hope or who are not the followers of the living God. People who constantly look dejected who look like they have no hope.

How about your actions? What do your deeds say about your family? Do you act like a pagan or are you distinctively set apart?

Just as an aside Cremation – Ancient Christians buried their dead, while Romans, Greeks, Hindus, Buddhists, all burned them. This was because the other religions saw the body as a prison while Christians know that just as Christ’s body was raised incorruptible from the dead, we too will be raised that way some day. ***WSC Q37: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?***

A37: The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness,[1] and do immediately pass into glory;[2] and their bodies, being still united to Christ,[3] do rest in their graves[4] till the resurrection.[5]

So while I have done funerals where the person was cremated, and I’m not saying it’s a sin to cremate especially when costs are prohibitive, or that God can’t reassemble any body no matter what the condition, I am saying that burial is more appropriate for Christians, more in keeping with our hope.

Are You Resisting the Death culture? – We have a culture preoccupied not with life, but with death. We are constantly campaigning for new rights to die and put to death those who are inconvenient to us. Our games are all about killing one another. I remember being over a friend’s house watching a group of boys playing Game Cube, and reflecting that now the way we spend time playing with our friends involves realistically murdering them again and again and again. Have we stopped to consider the desensitizing effect of thousands of hours of that? Will it teach children to respect life and view the shedding of man’s blood as the most serious of all acts?

In our culture, Halloween has become our most popular holiday. For the existentialists, whether to kill yourself was the only choice. In the word of Modern materialism life is just a brief blip in the universal constant of death. From death and nothingness everything came, and to death and nothingness everything will return they say. They deny even the existence of a soul, we are just machines: an “evolutionary psychologist” Stephen Pinker wrote mockingly: ***“Ferguson instead seems to want to root morality on the theory that a deity injects a fertilized ovum with a ghostly substance, which registers the world, pulls the levers of behavior, and leaks out at the moment of death... Centuries ago it was unwise to ground morality on the dogma that the earth sat at the center of the universe. It is just as unwise today to ground it on dogmas about souls endowed by God.”*** We are seeing the results of a morality, or actually an *amorality* grounded on the idea that we are soul-less machines in a universe of death without a God and without hope.

Finally for the non Christian: When I do funerals for unbelievers it is one of the saddest of moments because while I can preach the gospel to the living I can not offer any hope regarding the dead. Their unbelief and deeds showed they were not in the family of God and thus they go away to:

Matthew 25:46 "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

Now there is hope, BELIVE NOW, before it is too late for hope.