

APRIL 6

Deuteronomy 29-30

We are at the end of the sermon and almost at the end of the books of Moses. These five books are some of the hardest for people to read, but they are incredibly important to understanding the flow of God's plan through the Bible and the fulfillment of His plan in Jesus. Even though I'm living thousands of years since these were written, as I read Deuteronomy my heart responds to God's love and promises. I feel what God wants to do with these people. I understand the blessing of it because I've experienced the spirit of this blessing in Christ. The difference is that I've been set free from the bondage of sin. I also have the complete Word of God, and I have the Spirit living in me to help me. Even then I struggle. These people didn't have that advantage. But they did have some advantages. They saw miracles daily. They were receiving the same Word. And we'll see today, that they were saved by faith and told how to express it. Some of these men and women will be standing with us in the kingdom. I'll want to ask them, "What was it like?"

Deuteronomy 29

Vs. 1-9 This is a summary of the miracle of their lives for 40 years. Every day was a miracle, not only in what happened (the manna) but in what didn't happen (sickness and clothes and shoes wearing out). But did they understand what was happening and what God was doing?

V. 4 This is a key verse. Even though God had done amazing things for Israel, they didn't have a heart of understanding. The blame is somehow on God. He didn't give it to them. It is not that God should have taken away their free will and "made them understand," but that God did not subject them to the full rigors of a program that would have led them to real understanding. They learned a lot in the wilderness in 40 years, but to lead them to real understanding would take thousands of years. Israel is still in process. God will not magically induce sudden obedience and understanding, but the weight of their history, their coming desperation, and the way things will fall into place in the last days will create a sense of seeking God that Israel has never possessed.

This is how God works with us too. He doesn't put us in a spiritual trance and override our wills, but rather molds our hearts and minds as we follow and as we suffer. Some of us actually get tired of banging our heads on the wall and hurting ourselves and say, "You know, I think I'm seeing that God does have a couple of good ideas."

V. 9 In the absence of understanding (taking to heart) all that God had done for them, and understanding all God was doing in the plan of redemption for mankind, they were told just to obey. I may not understand the mechanics of how a circuit board works and I may not understand all the implications of events, but I can obey, so that if the red light goes on, I obey and push that button. That's what Israel was supposed to do.

Vs. 10-15 This entire sermon is for the renewal of the covenant, but here the purpose is stated. The mention of the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not an historical reference. It is the power behind what is happening there. This is the object of their faith. In a few verses we'll see that this is really driven by faith.

Vs. 14-15 If you want to see an interesting connection, look at vs. 5 and 6 in our psalm for today. Actually today's entire installment of Psalm 78 (4 in all) has to do with the history we are reading about.

Vs. 16-29 Notice in vs. 18 and 19 there are two *bewares*, addressed to two different kinds of people, one religious, and one unreligious. Notice that these two people become one person, referred to now by a singular pronoun. This one person becomes responsible for vs. 22-29. The concept is that one person can lead to the downfall of the entire nation if they do not beware and obey the Lord.

V. 22 Notice how important the next generation is. This is exactly what Asaph says, and laments, in the psalm.

Notice that God's truth will still be acknowledged by the nations, even in Israel's ruin in vs. 24-28. The nations will understand that Israel's downfall was caused by their lack of faith and obedience.

Vs. 26-27 Notice that the evidence of their disobedience will be idol worship. For our modern, western minds idol worship seems utterly crazy, but we have just learned to hide and disguise our idols. The *therefore* in v. 27 is important.

V. 29 seems to be saying, "Don't try to figure out God. Just respond to what you know, what He has done, and obey Him."

Deuteronomy 30

Vs. 1-10 What I find interesting here is that God already knows they will fail. God will be using them to show all of mankind the absolute power of sin without God's intervention. But God will honor Israel for using them like this and He will fulfill all the promises. Not only that, all of their history and God's working in all their generations will lead them to understand. Look at v. 6. This hasn't happened yet, but in the Tribulation Israel will finally submit its heart to God and become God's loving, testifying people for the next 1007 years.

Do you notice recurring phrases? Notice how often it says, *the Lord (Yahweh) your God*.

Vs. 11-14 To understand what Moses and God are saying here, you need to read this in Romans 10:1-10. Salvation, then and now, is by faith. Salvation for them, and for us, is a very simple deal. It happens by believing God's promise and responding in love to Him. Our sin complicates this, exponentially. It's a good thing God doesn't give up.

Vs. 15-20 This is the climatic end of the message. Wow! Notice how often love is mentioned. I don't think you can find a message from God more caring and loving. And to think, as this message was given, there was a pillar of cloud over the tabernacle, and they had eaten manna that morning.

What this all inspires in me is the understanding that I need to live in absolute trust of God and His plan. There is much I don't understand, but I know His love in Christ and how I've been saved by grace from this tragedy of lost humanity. I need to cry out and not complain, understanding that He meets my needs and hears my voice as I follow Him in the harvest. I need to understand His love and His plan and even when I don't understand, I need to follow and obey. He is loving, and Jesus did much more than He will ever ask of me. What an easy life it would be if I really understood all that and followed. The central point of all of this obedience and following, even for us as disciples, is not perfection, but the love of God. We acknowledge His great love and acts of kindness, and then we feebly try to show our gratitude and love by following our Savior in the harvest to let others know what He has done for us. Disciples are made, fruit is borne, the Father is glorified and we are shown to be Jesus' disciples. And it's all out of love.

Luke 11:37-12:7

Time wise, this is still the November before Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Luke 11:37-54

Vs. 37-41 I find it interesting that Jesus was willing to accept an invitation to a Pharisee's house, knowing what kind of confrontation would arise.

So, why did Jesus react like this? It seems that Jesus is starting the fight. Didn't He know how to blend with people? I only say this because we put so much emphasis on meeting people halfway

and never saying anything that would offend anyone. These people were in a special category, leaders of the people, and Jesus had tried to show them a lot of love and patience, like in John 5.

I think Jesus' words here are a response to the deadly influence of the leaders. In the first 36 verses of this chapter Jesus was confronted by the people, not the leaders, regarding the origin of His power and His failure to show a sign of His Messiah-ship. Where had the people learned to explain away Jesus and the signs He did? The leaders had taught them. They had given the people a lie to hinder them from entering the kingdom of God, and it was working. Jesus now, understandably, has words for the leaders.

Vs. 42-44 If you want to underline something, look at the "woes." Actually, the Pharisees get off kind of easy. Their main sin was hypocrisy. In light of all we've read in Leviticus, v. 44 is interesting. A person became unclean before the Lord and unable to worship before the Lord by walking on graves. Jesus is saying that even by accidental contact with the Pharisees or their teaching, people became unable to come before God. That was a huge charge against them, but remember that Jesus is God the Son. Who better to utter this judgment?

Vs. 45-52 The reason this scribe butted in was that, aside from their personal hypocrisy, the Pharisees were only following what they, the scribes/lawyers, had laid out as an interpretation of the law. This guy should have kept his mouth shut.

V. 46 The scribes were also hypocrites. They thought the people were "sinners" and damaged goods. The scribes and Pharisees were OK before God. But they had to make the laws harsh for the "cattle," of which they were not a part.

Vs. 47-51 This was not just a "bomb," it was a nuclear strike. Can you imagine hearing that all of the sins of rebellion to God's Word of all previous generations would come upon your generation because of YOU. That is what Jesus is telling them, Jesus the Son of God, God the Son, the Son of Man. This judgment would come when the temple would be destroyed, in 70 A.D. This is what Paul was referring to in 1 Corinthians 7:29.

V. 49 One interesting note here is that Jesus says, "*Therefore also the Wisdom of God said...*" There is a line of thinking that when it talks about the wisdom of God creating in Proverbs 3:19 and 8:22ff, it is actually referring to Jesus. In John 1:3, it says that Jesus was the creator in terms of design and command. Anyway, it is interesting here that Jesus personifies *the Wisdom of God* in condemning the scribes. On Wednesday before He dies, Jesus will pronounce these same woes on the scribes and Pharisees again in Matthew 23, but when He gets to this pronouncement in v. 34, Jesus says, "*Therefore I send you prophets and wise men....*" Pretty interesting, I think.

Luke 12:1-7

V. 1 So, how do you think these two paragraphs are connected to what just happened? Oddly enough, this section seems kind of reflected in the Proverb for today.

Vs. 2-3 What is the link between vs. 1 and 2? It seems to be that the leaven of the Pharisees involved concealing the truth. Jesus is also telling His disciples to avoid hypocrisy at all costs. God will always actively bring truth to light, even among His own children. Many men in ministry haven't taken this warning seriously.

Vs. 4-7 Jesus launches into another training session for His disciples. Much of this has been said before in the Sermon on the Mount, but that was 18 months ago. Now the disciples were entering a tunnel with Jesus and they would emerge, figuratively speaking, in a stadium for a contest to the death. They would now become, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:9, *like men sentenced to death...a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.*

The reality was that the Pharisees would win, temporarily. And in every generation of those working in the harvest, there are times when the wicked win and the followers of Christ are like sheep for the slaughter. God is in control of that too, for His good purpose.

Vs. 6-7 If you read this in the Sermon on the Mount, you'll see the slight difference in the sparrows. It's interesting that the references to the *sparrows* and the *hairs of your head* (proving that God can subtract, in my case) are meant to give us confidence to proclaim the truth in the face of opposition. The song, "His Eye is on the Sparrow," is a comforting song, and I'm sure it's ok to apply the *sparrows* to comfort in knowing God always sees us and that He knows us intimately. Not trying to be pushy, but the context of the *sparrows* here in Luke is comfort in the crisis of trying to reach the lost with the truth of the gospel in a dying, resistant world. It is easy for us to remove "mission" and the "compelling love of Christ," and to see the whole point of God's comfort and love only as it is directed toward us to help us in our loneliness and need. I don't think that directing all of our prayer and worship to our personal need makes God happy. Christianity can easily become all about our needs and not about reaching a dying world. To get the power of what Jesus is saying here, you have to be in the harvest with your life on the line to reach the lost and make disciples.

As disciples, we will never be free of fear. Not only are we tempted to focus on what others think about us, but we think that our skill in the delivery of the truth is vital. We concentrate so much on ourselves that we lose the compassion that compels us to follow Christ into the harvest. In truth, we really fear people and persecution. I don't think we'll ever get over it. Even Paul had to remind Timothy to be willing to suffer for the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8, 2:3, 4:5) and Paul himself pleaded with the Ephesians to pray for him that he would have courage to proclaim the message boldly (Eph. 6:19-20). But love casts out all fear, and guess whose love that would be.

Jesus' discipleship sermon continues tomorrow.

Psalm 78:1-31

This psalm will be spread over the next four days. This song sounds a little like the sermon of Stephen that got him killed, the punch line being, *You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.* (Acts 7:51) But here the message is a little more positive with a double-pronged agenda.

First: The psalmist is saying to Israel, "Obey God. Don't rebel like Israel did when He did amazing things and led them out of Egypt."

Second: He is saying to them, "Obey God and submit to David (or the house thereof). God decided not to choose Ephraim, but to choose Judah, and has done amazing things by delivering us and giving us peace through the leadership of David."

I'm explaining all of this, only because it will be easy to get lost in this psalm over the next few days and forget the point of its message. And, since the point of the psalm is revealed at the end, it would be helpful to know what's going on at the beginning.

It's hard to know when this was written, but it might have been during the hand off of the kingdom from David to Solomon, or it might have been written after the civil war with Absalom when there was a danger that the northern 10 tribes would break away.

Vs. 1-4 Note vs. 2 and 3. Matthew quotes this in Matthew 13:35, as one of the reasons Jesus used parables. At this point it seems that God is saying that the history of Israel leading up to the throne of David was a long determined plan of God. David was revealing some aspect of the mystery of God's plan.

Vs. 5-8 Notice the references to teaching children. These verses sound like Moses in Deuteronomy.

Vs. 9-16 The reference to the Ephraimites in v. 9 will make sense when you get to vs. 67-72. Remember in Genesis that Jacob gave the firstborn right to Ephraim over his other sons, but even in Jacob's blessing of his sons, God moved him to give Judah preeminence. Later, in Numbers, we see Judah being the largest tribe. Of all the men of fighting age who went into Canaan to spy

it out, only two men, one from Ephraim and one from Judah, were faithful to God. When it came to God's decision, He chose Judah to lead Israel, not Ephraim. David was chosen and God made a covenant with him and the Christ was to come from the line of David.

Here, the psalmist is showing that Ephraim didn't lead the people to obedience to God during the time in the wilderness. But that is what David (a son of Judah) is doing now.

Vs. 17-31 You recognize this as the event recorded in Numbers 11.

The rest of this psalm should be very familiar to you. Notice the alternating of blessing and disobedience. God is making a case for His steadfast love and amazing mercy.

For us as disciples, I would say the message is, "Obey God, be amazed at what He has done and submit to what He is doing." I've wasted too much time complaining about what God has done that I haven't liked, to the point of, really, forgetting God and missing His love.

Proverbs 12:19-20

The moral of the story is "tell the truth and plan for peace." Notice too that there is the thought of longevity of life and influence in all of this. The more you think about these verses, the deeper they lead your thoughts.