

God's Encouragement for Ever Era

15th Sun. after Pent. – 09/01/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 1 [Moses encourages God's people saying,] **"...listen to the statutes and the just decrees that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live..."**.

Introduction

- ✘ The title of the book in which we find our Old Testament Reading tells us what we're receiving when we hear, study and apply this Word from God into our lives today.
 - ➔ The word "Deuteronomy" literally means "second law" or "repeated law". Moses is the one whom God directed to speak and write these words through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- ✘ The setting is in the land of Moab, on the east side of the Jordan River. Moses has been God's appointed leader to guide Israel through the wilderness for the last 40 years to this point. Now, they are eager and ready to finally enter into The Promised Land.
 - ➔ But you see, there are two things that impact their situation. First, Moses has been told directly from Yahweh that he will not be allowed to enter into The Promised Land because he did not carefully follow God's directions earlier at the place called Meribah. You see, when the people quarreled with God and complained about their lack of water, God intended to show them the true, life-giving power of His Word. So He directed Moses, "tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water" (Num. 20:8).
 - ➔ But Moses didn't trust that God's Word alone could do such a thing. He thought there was something he had to do along with God's command. So he struck the rock twice with his staff. And the water did gush forth, but Yahweh was angry at Moses and He said, "Because you did not believe in Me, to uphold Me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly in the land that I have given them" (Num. 20:12).
- ✘ Now, some months later, at the very entrance to The Promised Land which is just on the opposite side of the Jordan, Moses has learned his lesson. Forty years after God first brought Israel out from under Pharaoh's slavery, saving them and making them His Chosen People by the power of His undeserved grace and giving them His perfect Law from Mt. Sinai as a covenant for how His people must live their lives before Him, God gives Moses his last assignment.
 - ➔ He tells Moses to encourage what is estimated to be around 2 to 2.5 million people by recounting God's Law to them before they cross the Jordan without him. So Moses does that here with the Book of Deuteronomy. He reminds them of God's mighty work in, with and among His people from Egypt to the present day.
 - ➔ And this time, Moses is careful; he is direct with the people. He calls them and all future generations to listen to, keep, and trust entirely in the power of God's Word – not his works or their works along with God's Word to help and guide and strengthen them for life. He uses the terms "statutes", "just decrees", "teachings", "commandments" and "laws" – all references to God's holy and perfect Word.
- ✘ You and I, friends – we are the "children's children" that Moses says in verse nine are also to know and be encouraged by this same life-giving Word. So, let's all sit up, open our ears; our hearts; and our minds to be encouraged by God.

I. God's Statutes (Word) do not change. (vv.1-2)

- ✘ It's clear that Moses does not want any of God's people moving forward in history to make the same mistake that he made. So, first thing, he starts verse one by saying, "...listen to the statutes and the just decrees that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that Yahweh, the God of your fathers, is giving you."
 - ➔ That's two things that we sinners have struggled with from the time of Adam and Eve. 1) Actually listening to directions, guidance, and teaching from those in authority who care about us. I don't mean pretending like your listening, but paying close attention to every detail and then actually doing them; that is following God's Word as He intends us to do.
- ✘ Notice that Moses specified that the giver of both these perfect Words and this Promised Land is "the God of your fathers". This too is a direct encouragement – don't be swayed by the people around you to listen to or follow their gods. Don't let your own pride or your earthly desires make you think that you are now the god of your own life. No, the one true God is the only God that has ever existed and does not and cannot change. Yahweh, the great I Am – who was, is and will be forever, God.
 - ➔ And since that truth is beyond dispute, then verse two must be taken seriously, "You shall not add to the Word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your God that I command you." What's Moses saying here? "Don't do what I did, when I let my pride get the best of me and I added to God's Word so that I would look good before the people and I struck the rock with my staff."
- ✘ That's such an important thing for us all to take to heart, isn't it? Just, don't do it. Don't even entertain those terrible five words, "But I know better now." Moses didn't know better than God. No one else in all of history has known better than God. And neither do you...or !!
- ✘ Besides, look at what God's Word has the power to do according to verse two. Three things: 1) Moses says, "that you may live." Later on in Deuteronomy 32:46-47 Moses says of God's Word, "Take to heart all the Words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this Word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess." And beyond God's Word helping us in this earthly life, Paul shows us in Romans 1:16 the far greater power that God's Gospel Word of Jesus has saying, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
 - ➔ 2) Moses also shows that God's decrees travel with us wherever we "go". The people of Israel saw that first hand as they traveled through the wilderness for 40 years. But now Moses says "listen" and "do" God's decrees as you "go in" to the land before you. What a comfort, right? No matter what you're doing; no matter where you are at – even if you're somewhere that, god-forbid, the government or parents or teachers or boss or someone else says you can't bring God and His Word – they can't stop it. This is why Psalm 119:11 says, "I have stored up Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You." When you memorize; when you pay attention to and place God's Word in your heart, the power and benefits and comfort of God are with you wherever you are at.
 - ➔ 3) Moses says God's decrees are intended to guide His people as they/we possess God's gifts for doing His will. At the time of Moses, God's Word was their guide for how to live and what to do in the new Promised Land. For you and me, God's Word still has the best guidance and direction for how we are to live as a student in school; an employee or employer at work; a neighbor at home; a parent, a grandparent, a community member or even just a driver on the highway. The gifts and opportunities and resources that God gifts to us are endless. But every one of them comes with principles and guidance for how to use them best for our good and for God's glory in His perfect Word.

II. God's Commands (Word) are Our Wisdom. (v.6)

✘ Four times – in verses 2, 6 & 9 – there is a very important Hebrew word that Moses uses for our encouragement here. It's translated as "keep". In the Hebrew the word is שָׁמַר (shāmar). And it means to "guard, give heed, preserve or do something very carefully".

→ This is how Moses encourages us all to think of and treat God's statutes and just decrees. In fact when we do so, he promises that God's Words will then be our wisdom and understanding, which makes sense, because what other source can there be for perfect, objective truth than the one and only perfect and eternal God.

✘ And Moses goes even further in verse six, saying that this "wisdom"; that this "understanding" that God promises us in His Word – when we live according to it, it will become visible "in the sight of the peoples...".

→ This doesn't mean we're living with an arrogant, "I'm greater and wiser than you" kind of attitude; or that we're beating people over the head with God's Word in an unloving manner. No. But we do not shy away either from living and speaking in our day to day routines according to God's Law in the Ten Commandments and His Gospel of grace and forgiveness and unrestrained love for all people. Yes, when we "guard, heed, preserve and do these carefully" we will look and sound different from most people. But that's God's intent for us, folks. And we do it because of all that God has done for us in giving us the life and salvation that we do not deserve.

III. God's Just Decrees (Word) Define Our Identity. (6-8)

✘ You see, that's what Moses even says will happen. God's just decrees and perfect Word will be what actually defines and shapes our identity in this world. Then the world around us will have to say, "'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as Yahweh our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him?" (v.7)

→ In Moses' day Israel actually became a world nation of believers in Yahweh. Today, the nation of Israel, of which the Bible is talking, is the One Holy Christian Church; the gathering of all true believers in Christ.

✘ Yes, it's Jesus – His saving work on the cross for sinners and His resurrection victory over death; it's all of us that He has gathered into His Church through the gift of faith given as He brought us through the water and Word of baptism, that sets us apart from the rest of the world.

→ Because we all started out the same – sinful to the core and separated from God by that sin and unbelief. That's what Jesus was talking about in our Gospel Reading today in Mark 7:21-23 with the list of all of the evil things that come "from within, out of the heart" of all mankind.

✘ But God would not just leave the people He created to die in that sin and eternal condemnation. So, as Moses says, He came near to save us. He came through His servant Moses to lead the people through the Red Sea; to save them; to guide them through the wilderness as He taught them to follow and keep His Law, so that they could live as His holy nation.

→ All of that led to His ultimate act of nearness and love, when He came Himself in the flesh and blood of His Son, Jesus; as the Word of God made flesh (Jn. 1:14) so that in Jesus, God Himself could die for our guilt and rise for our salvation. Now, as Jesus says, in John 14:23, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." That's who we are. That's what we are now today – defined by God's Word; by His grace through faith in Jesus.

IV. God's Word Defines our Future and Legacy. (v.9)

- ⊗ And now verse nine defines both the future and the legacy of all of us as God's holy people. Moses actually uses that Hebrew word שָׁמַר (shāmar) back to back in this verse along with the Hebrew word מָאֵד (mēōd) that modifies שָׁמַר (shāmar) to mean that God is calling us to “preserve, guard, keep and do” God's Word “in the highest degree” so that we “preserve, guard, keep” our soul; our self; our life from forgetting or moving away from our loving and saving Lord.
 - There's two reasons this is so important. First, as Hebrews 2:1 says, “...we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it” and lose our own salvation and eternal life with Jesus. That's how God's Word defines and preserves our future into eternity.
 - As to our legacy, Moses says, “Make [God's decrees] known to your children and your children's children” (v.9). If our Christian ancestors had not preserved and passed God's saving Word on to us; if they had just gone with the flow of the culture as so many do today, you and I would not be blessed as we are right now.
- ⊗ But we are blessed...beyond compare by Jesus. We are loved by Him and we are guided by His Law and Gospel for this life and for eternity. And in God's Law – Proverbs 1:8 tells us, if we are children, “Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching.” And if we are parents Moses directs us in Deuteronomy 11:19, “You shall teach [God's Words] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (i.e. all day long)
 - And Psalm 71:18 shows that this encouragement from God never leaves us while we are here on earth. It says, “So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim Your might to another generation, Your power to all those to come.” May He guide us all to do just that, in Jesus' name. Amen.