

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Different governments make different issues the priority for their country. For some it's the economy for others military strength. These things are viewed as lifelines. In Gods order of things 'obedience to his commands' occupies that place. Its not the health service that will enable them to enjoy long life but keeping his decrees.

Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey. (3)

At one level keeping the ten commandments doesn't seem that difficult. Do we really need to be as careful as these verses imply? Moses speaks as someone who knows how short lived and superficial obedience can be. We need to listen carefully to his instructions.

These commandments I give you today are to be on your hearts. (6) Jesus spells this out for us in the Sermon on the Mount. If we are not to murder we must deal with the resentment and irritation that bubbles beneath the surface. And similarly with adultery and lust.

Impress them on your children. Parents are entrusted with the responsibility of teaching these commands to their family. No doubt we will need to be organised and intentional about doing this but we are also to be on the look out for informal opportunities to talk about Gods ways.

Tie them as symbols on your hands.... Write them on the door frames of your houses. God clearly does not have much confidence in our stickability. We need to find ways to keep his word before ourselves.

These are not rules for rules sake. The commandments are an expression of Gods character. To keep them is to lovingly aspire to be like our God. Jesus instructed his disciples: *Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.* (John 14:21)

- It might be worth reminding yourself of the commandments (Deut 5:6-21)
- Which area requires some attention: your heart, your children, your conversation, your décor?
- Deuteronomy is written to encourage us to choose life by choosing obedience. Are we opting for this choice?

Deuteronomy 6:10-25.

When you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord (12)

The danger in prosperity is we congratulate ourselves in our success. Success in turn inflates our pride and diminishes our sense of dependence on God. Moses was at pains to impress on Israel that their future prosperity had nothing to do with them. *When the Lord brings you into the land..... with large flourishing cities you did not build, houses ... you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards you did not plant.* The NT puts it like this: *Don't be deceived my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. (James 1:16,17)*

Moses urges care. *Fear the Lord, serve him, take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods.* And Moses tells us why. *For the Lord your God who is among you is a jealous God.* Israel are to think of themselves as the Lord's bride. They have been richly provided for by their loving husband. He looks for their faithful love expressed in their obedience to his commands.

The obedient life will prompt questions. *In the future when your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?' Fathers are to answer that question by explaining that God has not merely brought them out (of Egypt) but he has also brought them into something. They have been rescued from death so that they can live the God ordered life of obedience. (23) He brought us out from there to bring us in.... The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees... so that we might always prosper and be kept alive.*

- When we eat and are satisfied what can we do to remind ourselves of our dependence on God and his grace?
- What things threaten our devotion to the Lord?
- Do we need to make some changes so someone might ask us the question of v20?

Deuteronomy 7:1-11

The first 5 verses set out what Israel is to do to the inhabitants of Canaan. It is summed up in that phrase: *Make no treaty with them and show them no mercy. (2)*

We find this distressing and rightly so. Luke describes Jesus arrival at the capital city. *As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city he wept over it. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground you and the children within your walls. (Luke 19:41-44)* Those who weep at the prospect of judgment reflect the behaviour of the Lord Jesus.

Deuteronomy reminds us that though judgment is a fact, God is slow to anger. Four hundred and thirty years have passed since God spoke to Abraham of the sins of the Amorites (Gen 15:16). The behaviour of these nations described in Leviticus 18 (see 24-28) emphasises that God is just. And we need to remind ourselves that the fate of the Canaanites acts as a preview of the judgment that is still to come.

In this new culture that Israel are going to be exposed to it is vital that they understand their identity. On the one hand they are to see themselves as Gods treasured possession (6) chosen out of all the nations on the earth. But they are also to remind themselves that there is no logic to this. Gods choice was not based on the kinds of things that shape our choices. It is grace from start to finish. It is wondering at and being amazed by the free, unprompted, promise keeping love of God that is to motivate their grateful obedience and ours.

- Can we see the danger people around us are in?
- Paul prays that the Ephesians will have power to grasp the dimension of Gods love in Christ. That would be a good prayer for us to pray for ourselves.
- Israel was called *a people holy to the Lord*. Living by the word of God will make us distinctive particularly over issues like sexual ethics. Are we prepared to be different?

Deuteronomy 7:12-26

Covenant blessing (12-16)

It is a repeated theme in Deuteronomy: the law is the key to success. *If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors. (12)* The life described by the commandments is the life of multiplication and fruitfulness (13,14). Do not mistake this for legalism. This is the outcome of the loving relationship between the Lord and his

people (6:4-6). In a letter (Galatians) where Paul is at pains to refute a mistaken attitude to the law he goes on to say: *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one commandment: Love your neighbour as yourself. (Gal 5:14)* This is our response to the costly grace of God expressed in the death of Christ. (Gal 2:20) It leads to the kind of fruitfulness enabled by the Spirit and described in details as *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. (Gal 5:22)*

Spiritual Conflict (17-21)

The task awaiting Israel beyond the Jordan was formidable. They were a small nation and the Canaanites were powerful and well defended. Logically they could not expect to prevail. (17) Fear is Satan's best weapon. Looking to ourselves and our resources will end in failure. Israel are invited to remember the Exodus and to look to the Lord. That remains the Bible's instructions for task of communicating the gospel. Left to ourselves we are weak and inadequate. In the context of spiritual conflict Paul writes: *Finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (Eph 6:10)*

Unique Ministry (22-26)

We need to bear in mind the big picture. God plans to bless the nations. That is his promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3) and it remains central to the Deuteronomy agenda. The destruction of the Canaanites is not a contradiction of this goal. They pose a threat because of their proximity and depravity. Like a malignancy they are to be removed that the attractive life of God will flourish and be seen in the national life of Israel. (4:5-8)

- Are you convinced that the blessing of God is linked to obedience to his word?
- Are we involved in the task of taking the gospel to our unbelieving culture? Are we listening to ourselves (*You may say to yourselves, these nations are stronger than we are. 17*) or looking to the Lord?

Deuteronomy 8:1-9

Don't forget the lessons of the past. (1-5)

As Israel pauses before they push on into the Promised Land, Moses invites them to reflect on the lessons of the last 40 years. They are people who have been to school. The wilderness has been a place of testing (2) and discipline. (5) We are at an advantage if we can learn to see the difficulties and setbacks of this world as part of God's training and discipline. The Lord Jesus knew what it was to be led into the wilderness to be tested. He learned obedience from what he suffered. (Hebrews 5:8)

The big lesson was contained in the provision of the manna. Moses reminded them, *"feeding you with manna.... To teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord"* (3) Manna appeared mysteriously on the ground. No one knew what it was. Was it poisonous or seasonal or simply a freak of nature? It was the word of God that explained to them significance and nature (it appeared 6 out of 7 days) of this life sustaining substance. It is the word of God that illuminates so much else.

As manna sustained life so too did the commands, decrees and laws of their God. As Jesus would demonstrate hundreds of years later the controlling influence in his life was not his appetites but God's word. Invited to turn the stone into bread he replied with these words from Deuteronomy (Matt 4:4 & Deut 8:3) For him they were the red light that brought things to a halt no matter how great a hurry you might be in.

- Are you conscious of going through a time of testing at present. Notice how God supplied the needs of his people during their journey. (4)

- Give thanks for the illuminating word of God that brings understanding to our lives.
- Jesus knows what is like to feel the pressure of temptation. Its why he meets us with sympathy when we go to him with our struggles and failures.

Deuteronomy 8:10-20

Moses concern for these people goes beyond the battles and warfare that is before for them. The danger is not only located in their enemies swords but in their own egos. *When you have eaten and are satisfied...Be careful that you do not forget the Lord (10,11). You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me' (17)*

The first half of the chapter recalls the ways in which Gods humbled them during their journey. Now they must humble themselves. Helpfully Moses teaches us how to do this.

When you have eaten and are satisfied praise the Lord your God. The Songs of Ascent (Psalm 120 - 134) are associated with pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem. They helpfully emphasise the worshippers dependence. As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of female slaves look to the hand of their mistress so our eyes look to the Lord our God. (Psalm 123) If the Lord had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive (Psalm 124) Unless the Lord builds the house the builders labour in vain (Psalm 127)

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God failing to observe his commands. (11)

The implication is if we are not careful we will forget. This may be part of the reason the Lord Jesus instituted the Lords Supper. It keeps before us how immense our debt is. The Scriptures too regularly remind us of what we once were. Speaking to Gentiles Paul writes: *remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel.. without hope and without God in the world. (Eph 2:12)*

The Bible would also set before us a picture of progress that is about growing down rather than up. Witness the development in the way Paul saw himself. In 1 Cor 15 he describes himself 'the least of the apostles', in Ephesians he calls himself 'less than the least of all Gods people' and by the time we come to 1 Timothy the phrase he uses is 'chief of sinners'

- We live in a culture that loves to grumble and complain. We need to fight against this tendency and encourage our souls to 'praise the Lord'
- Ours is the day of entitlement. Your worth it. You've earned it. It's your right. We need to filter out the lies and keep reminding ourselves we are what we are by the grace of God.
- The way to retain a small view of ourselves is to have a big view of God. Look out for those parts of the Bible that emphasise Gods greatness.

Deuteronomy 9: 1-17

These sermons, preached east of the Jordan as Israel prepares to enter Canaan, look beyond the immediate conflict. Moses is concerned about the outlook of a victorious Israel.

After the Lord your God has driven them out before you do not say to yourself, "The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness" (4) This point is repeated three times in three verses.

God knows the story we like to tell ourselves. It's a story of worth and self congratulation. Jesus highlighted it in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. *To some who were*

confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable. (Luke 18:9-14)

But Moses rubs the noses of these people in their past failure. *Remember this and never forget it...*(7) He goes on to describe in great detail the events at Horeb (Sinai) when they made and worshipped the golden calf.

Our sin is not to be airbrushed out of our history. Daniel and Nehemiah were under no illusions about their past (Dan 9: 4-19, Neh 1:5-11) Paul recalled his previous behaviour (1 Tim 1:12-14). The Bible makes just this point to us. (Eph 2:1-10)

This is not a matter of secondary importance. Jesus Christ is only attractive to sinners. The nation of Israel would reject their Messiah over this very point. If you think you are acceptable as you are or righteousness can be gained through your behaviour you will have no interest in the gospel.

And to those who would argue that recalling past sin is a route to uncertainty their attention needs to be directed to v5. *God will drive them out before you to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.* Our security is located in Gods faithfulness to his covenant not in our imagined righteousness.

- Let Gods word tell you, your story. Read Eph 2:1-10 or Rom 5:1-11
- Remind yourself of the basis of your relationship. Heb 8:7-13
- Thank God for his mercy.

Deuteronomy 9: 18-29

The second half of this chapter goes on to list Israel's past failure. To the golden calf are added the events linked to the places in v22,23.

In a day that has domesticated God and conceived him in benign terms we ought to be very grateful for Moses record of these events. Sin makes God angry. (19) *I feared the anger and wrath of the Lord, for he was angry enough with you to destroy you.* There are two places in the Bible where the wrath of God is particularly clear. The first is Judah's exile to Babylon (2 Kings 25) the other is the death of Christ.

Israel's lifeline is the prayers of Moses. There is nothing slick or easy about this. He prays and fasts for almost 6 weeks. He falls prostrate before God. He marshals arguments to present on behalf of the people.

What do sinful people need? They need leaders who know how to pray. Families need parents who will pray; churches need elders and nations leaders who will intercede on behalf of those they are responsible for. Ultimately it involves all of us: *If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. (1 John 5:16)* Moses prevents us thinking this is some casual invitation to send a brief thought heavenward. Like Moses it may involve persistence, deprivation and distress.

Prayer is something we are to learn. Moses offers us a prayer seminar as we listen in to him remind the Lord that Israel are his people (26), he made promises to their ancestors (27) and his reputation is at stake (28)

- What do our prayers say about what we believe about God?
- Jesus taught his disciples to pray. The Bible is full of prayers to teach us how to pray. Are we learning how to do this effectively?
- Are you aware of other people's sin? Are you praying about them?

Deuteronomy 10: 1-22.

In the first part of the chapter Moses describes the rewritten commandments and their location in the ark. Their importance is stressed with the words: *The Lord wrote on these tablets what he had written before, the Ten Commandments, he had proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly.* (4) The second half of the chapter describes how Israel are to live in the light of Gods merciful forgiveness.

The theme of obedience is relentless impressed upon the nation. Here they are urged to *walk in obedience to him* (12) and to *observe the Lord's commands* (13) They and we need to note the little phrase at the end: *for your own good.* To walk in obedience to him translates in the language of the psalmist to being *guided along paths of righteousness.* (Psalm 23) Sometimes that means '*green pastures and quiet waters*'. At other times it goes by way of '*the darkest valley*' but all the time its heading to arrival in '*the house of the Lord*'. This is where the commandments lead.

Moses urges the nation to change the way they respond to God's commandments. *Circumcise your hearts therefore and do not be stiff necked any longer.* (16) The people are invited to see their hugely privileged position. The God to whom everything in heaven and earth belongs has chosen and loved them out of all the nations on the earth. It is Gods amazing grace that prompts wholehearted obedience to his word.

As this great God has unexpectedly chosen the little nation of Israel so his priority lies not with the great and powerful but with the fatherless, the widow and the foreigner. (18) Consequently those who bear his name are to reflect these concerns in the way they relate to those around them. *And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigner in Egypt.* (19)

- How do you view Gods commandments, written 'for your own good' or an unwelcome imposition?
- We are often invited to see ourselves as 'victims' of injustice or misfortune. How does this passage invite us to see ourselves?
- Are there 'foreigners' known to us to whom we could display the Lords love?

Deuteronomy 11:1-32

Moses doesn't tire of impressing upon Israel the need to obey. *Love the Lord your God and keep his requirements* (1)

Disobedience to the word of the Lord has dire consequences. Moses (2-7) lists Gods actions on behalf of his people. He places the care of the people (5) between two acts of judgment (the defeat of Egypt and the fate of Dathan and Abiram). The message is clear. Don't take liberties with Gods word.

He emphasises the link between the fruitfulness of the land and the Lords involvement. (8-15) Unlike Egypt that needs to be irrigated Canaan is a well watered land. We are apt to take things like this for granted. In this environment water is a matter of life and death. Their relationship with the Lord is key to the success of their agriculture. *So if you faithfully obey the commands..... then I will send rain on your land.* (13)

It is no surprise to find idolatry mentioned next. *Be careful or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods* (16) Bal was a fertility god. Paying him respect was thought to ensure high yields and growing herds. The prescription is to *Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds.* (18) Idolatry is a matter of the heart before it becomes part of people's behaviour. Gods word has the capacity to reform my desires.

Deuteronomy invited Israel to choose life. Sometimes we tire of the trivial choices that make up our everyday lives. This though is not trivial. *See I am setting before you today blessing and cursing (26)*

- Moses invites Israel to reflect on the way God has led them. It would be a useful exercise for us to do the same.
- There is an emphasis here that underlines how dependent our lives are on God. Part of that dependence is learning to live *by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deut 8:3)*
- *Your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the Lord your God (2)* So as well as fixing these words in their hearts and minds they are to teach them to their children and talk about them at home (19) Is this something we talk about?