

DEUTERONOMY CHAPTER 6 – verses 4 – 19 September 22nd 2013

This is the third week in our series in Deuteronomy – so a very quick summary as to where we are up to. Deuteronomy is a book of speeches or sermons from Moses to the people of Israel as they prepare to enter the land that God had promised them. Moses was destined not to enter himself – but his task here was to teach them how they were to live as the people of the one true God and be a witness for Him to the surrounding nations. Last week we focused upon Chapter 5 where Moses recounts the giving of the 10 Commandments that had happened 40 years previously at Mount Sinai. There were two reasons why they were obey these commandments.

The first reason was because it was for their own good – that “they might prosper always” – the commandments were given to bring freedom and fulfilment both in our relationship with God and each other.

The other reason is the statement that is declared at the beginning of the commandments in verse 6 (key verse – worth reading again)

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
You shall have no other gods before me”

This God had powerfully revealed Himself to them and graciously delivered them from slavery and was now going to give them a good land to possess and dwell in.

It was an amazing act of grace and power.

We considered last week how as New Testament believers we can re interpret this verse in light of Jesus and all we know about Him. He has come to us as the true revelation of God and has delivered us too - not from physical slavery but spiritual slavery and has promised us eternal life if we believe and trust in what He has done for us.

Starting where we finished last week – the 10 commandments.

Here is a question – if I was to ask you what the most important commandment was – what would you say?

I ask this because this was a question that was given directly to Jesus by one of the teachers of the law. It is in Mark's gospel – let me read it to you:

Read Mark 12 verse 28.

What was the answer of Jesus? (Read it – verse 29 - 31)

Jesus actually does not quote any of the 10 commandments – but He quotes directly first from Deuteronomy and then from Leviticus. In doing so, he brilliantly sums up the 10 Commandments while staying completely faithful to the Law that is found in the Old Testament.

Our focus is on the first of these quotes from Deuteronomy – it brings us on to our passage today which is Deuteronomy Chapter 6 which should before you now.

(READ Deuteronomy 6 verses 4, 5.)

This is one of the most important and defining texts of Old Testament faith.

This is the orthodox Jewish confession of faith – it is called “The Schema” – after the Hebrew word that means “to hear”. It is a confession that is still recited each morning and evening by devout Jews all over the world. So important is this that Jewish boys in orthodox homes are required to memorise it as soon as they can speak.

These words that are still known and loved by the Jewish people today – still learnt and recited.

The logic of the words is simple but important.

“Yahweh” – the God of Israel – is one - not a coalition of many gods like they would find in the land of Canaan that they were just about to enter. The nations around Israel worshipped many gods and goddesses, but Israel were to affirm to all around them that there is but one, true living God – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And since He is one God – then their love and devotion was not to be spread over a range of gods – it must solely be to this one God.

This great command is for us too as New Testament believers for Jesus gave it to us Himself – as I have already highlighted.

Let us consider it together then.

So, how are we to Love God?

With all our hearts, with all our soul and with all our strength.

ONE LORD, ONE LOVE, ONE LOYALTY – LOVING GOD WITH AN UNDIVIDED HEART.

What does it mean when it says that we are to Love God with all our heart and soul and strength? Is it primarily about how we feel about God?

Certainly it is not without feeling – but it has to be more than a feeling.

I would say above the feeling is a deep commitment – a profound grateful loyalty – a devotion of the heart – that leads to obedience.

It is a Love that touches everything about us and affects everything we do.

The Love here is more than a feeling – it is an act of the will that results in action.
As we choose to Love in action – the feelings will follow – not the other way around.
“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength”

It is maybe difficult for us to really get this. This is written in Hebrew and Hebrew thinking is actually different from the way we tend to think.

When it talks about the heart here, what does it mean?

I wonder what comes to your mind when you think of the heart.

Most of us have been raised with the Greek thinking that we are reason and emotion – we are head and heart – and the two are separate.

We think in our heads – and feel in our hearts. (Yes? That is my perception)

Our heart equates to our emotions and feelings – If we say something is very heartfelt we mean we have experienced strong emotions – if our hearts are broken it is because of an overwhelming painful emotion.

Is that not how we think of the heart?

But that is not the way it is here.

In Hebrew the heart is where we do our deepest thinking! (Confused?)

It is where we make our decisions – where we decide a particular cause of action – it is – and this is important – the centre of our wills.

So, in Hebrew thinking - you think and decide in your heart – it is what shapes your thoughts and attitudes, it is the place where your deepest beliefs and convictions and actions flow from.

Think – one significant way we show our love for God is in our decision making – with what we decide and then will to do.

That is what is meant by Loving God with all our heart.

What about the “soul”? When you hear the word soul – what comes into your mind? How would you describe what your soul is?

Not easy to answer.

I decided to ask a few people here at the Mission this question:

“Presuming you believe you have a soul – how would you describe it?

They had 30 seconds to answer so it was a bit unfair- here are the answers:

“I think I know what it is – but I can’t put it into words”

“It is my personality”

“It is the true me – it is who I am”

“It is located in your gut”

“It is the deepest part of your heart”

Here is the most profound one:

“Dissecting the body to find the soul is like dissecting a piano to find music”

(The person who said that was honest enough to say he got that from someone else)

It is a searching question.

The meaning in the Hebrew is “true self”.

To help us let me quote you another part of the Old Testament – Psalm 103 verse 1 –where David declares this:
“Praise the Lord , my soul: all my inmost being Praise His Holy name”

“All my inmost being” – that is helpful description from David!

In other words – everything that makes me, me”.

It is where my deep feelings, my deep desires are located, all the inner characteristics that essentially make up who I am.

So, Love Him with all your heart – let him shape your decisions and mould his will.

Love Him with all your soul – Love Him in your inmost being – Love Him with everything that you are.

Then we have “Love Him with all your strength”.

This is a really unusual one!

Apparently the actual Hebrew word is hard to translate for what it literally means in English is “exceedingly”.

But “Love him with all your exceedingly does not make sense in our language.

So I want (with the help admittedly of some commentaries – I am no expert in Hebrew!) to suggest it means this.

When you Love Him with all your heart and with all your soul – the way to express this is to Love Him to excess – to be totally extravagant in our Love – to go over the top .

“With all our strength could also be translated with an “over the topness”.

I hope that is clear and helps. We are to Love God with all we are, in all we do and with all we have. And we are to Love with excess and extravagance.

Let us pause here and have a reality check.

Is that the case?

Do we love Him as the one God – or are our affections divided?

Do we love Him in our thinking and in all our decision making?

Do we love him so deep down that it permeates our desires and stirs us to action?

Do we love him excessively – in a way that may cause others to look say “that is over the top”

The greatest commandment is our greatest challenge is it not?

So, presuming we want to rise to this challenge what will cause this Love for the Lord grow in our hearts and soul and be manifest in how we live?

What can we actually actively do so that our love will deepen and then be demonstrated?

Let us now read verses 6 – 19 – and I then want to pick out three things we are to do if we are to keep this great Command – remember given to us by Jesus himself – at the centre of our lives

READ DEUTERONOMY 6 Verses 6 - 19

Three things then we are to do – to help us all begin with an “R”

RECEIVE HIS WORD (verses 6 – 9)

The Jews took these instructions from Moses literally and wore portions of Scripture in little containers called phylacteries on their foreheads and left arm. They also attached a small container of scripture called a mezuzah to the front door and then every door in the house. Each occupant touched the mezuzah reverently each time he or she passed through the door. It was a sign that the house was to be a sanctuary for the Lord and a place where His word – the commands and His Law – was to be loved, taught and obeyed.

We obviously don't do that now – no one wearing phylacteries this morning – my home has not got a mezuzah on the front door and I haven't seen one on anyone else's.

But surely this can still challenge us now for what it speaks of is the depth to which these words are to penetrate and affect our lives. It is about the word of God touching everything – starting with our own hearts and then applying it to every area of our lives. Moses here admonished parents to discuss God's word in the home, among their children and to allow the word to guide their thoughts and actions as they work throughout the day. When it comes to our homes it isn't of course necessary to turn every room into a Chapel – but we surely can strive to make them places where the scriptures are honoured, places of warmth, hospitality, acceptance and love, places where we are not ashamed to proclaim and live out what we believe.

For us personally and individually, when we read or hear the word of God and receive it into our hearts, the Holy Spirit can enlighten and convict us of its truth to transform us from within. The New Testament talks about God writing His word upon our hearts in order that our lives speak of His Love and grace in order that we glorify Christ.

But this won't happen unless we give ourselves to meditating upon what God says to us through His living word. It is the primary way which God does speak to us – so we need to give ourselves to receive it and listen if it is to have its effect.

Something about the importance of listening.

Listening well is quite an art is it not – and very important in any healthy relationship.

Think of how much misunderstanding and conflict arises in human relationships because we just don't listen well to each other.

Real Love demands real listening in human relationships – if it is not there then it is not real love – is it? You always give someone value by listening well to them – and the opposite is also true.

We hear from God through what he says in His word – taking what it says and allowing it to touch and transform our hearts.

Are we listening well to God and responding?

I find that a challenging question personally – particularly when I consider that listening and responding is one measure of my Love for Him.

Second "R" – which we need to practice

REMEMBER HIS GRACE (verses 10 – 12)

Moses was teaching this new generation how they were live when they entered the promised land – for he knew that the land of Canaan would be a place of temptation as well as a place of triumph.

There was to be two big temptations.

Firstly, when they tasted success they would inherit wealth – and then they would be tempted to forget the Lord. The second big temptation would be for Israel to compromise with the pagan nations around them and no longer be distinctive as the people of God – Moses deals with this in Chapter 7 which we will come to.

Let us quickly think about that first temptation.

Moses named some of the material blessings the Lord would give the Israelites in the Promised Land. Large prosperous cities, wells, vineyards, olive groves – as well as the land itself.

This is what should have happened.

Whenever the Israelites took water from a well or fruit from the vines and trees or crops from the ground – they should have looked up with gratitude to the Lord and remembered where they once were and how they had been so blessed. Water is a precious commodity in the Middle East and they had not toiled to dig the wells – nor had they planted the vineyards or olive groves. It was a gift to them from a gracious God. But with these gifts came a great danger – when they had eaten their fill to forget the giver.

There are a number of key words that keep occurring in Deuteronomy – like "Listen" "teach" "Love" – another very important word is "Remember".

Careless forgetfulness is here introduced as a serious peril and a warning to them. Moses makes it clear that when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord.

This warning came not only once to them.

Turn over the page – Chapter 8 and verses 10 – 14 (read it).

Did you hear the danger that comes with prosperity?

It is pride – the belief and attitude that it is all down to me – look at what I have achieved – I don't need anyone for I have it all myself.

Pride, a hard heart and forgetting God always go together.

Moses knew that as they were about to enter the promised land that prosperity and success was a spiritual peril they needed to be aware of.

Surely we need to be aware of this now. Surely this is something we need to reflect upon and take very much to heart. For when things get comfortable, when we prosper – it is so easy for pride to grow and for selfishness, complacency and forgetfulness to take a grip in our lives.

Most people spiritually speaking find it easier to handle adversity than prosperity – because adversity can drive us back to God as we seek his strength and help.

When things are going well and we become comfortable are we not prone to relax our spiritual disciplines, take our blessings for granted and to forget to "Praise God from whom all Blessings flow".

Forgetfulness is not a sin confined to the Israelites after they had settled in the prosperous land of Canaan. Are we not, as God's people now, in danger of forgetting what He has done for us and how He has blessed us?

Do we not all need to guard against persistent ingratitude - we need to constantly remind ourselves that forgetting God's goodness to us seriously impoverishes our spirituality.

Here is a very profound Proverb from the book of Proverbs – Chapter 30 verse 8:

"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say "who is the Lord" or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God"

I think that is a great prayer.

Remember His grace and blessings to us – cultivate a habit and attitude of dependence and gratitude for that is a wonderful way to guard against pride and a hard heart. Instead of complaining about what we don't have – let us focus on and be thankful for what we do have.

Finally from this passage – our third "R" we are to do

REJECT ALL RIVALS (verses 13 – 19)

(Read verse 13 – 15 again)

We considered this last week – thinking about how the gods of Canaan were to be a constant threat for the affection for the hearts of the Israelites.

We thought about 21st Century gods that threaten us now – so I won't repeat that again now.

It is striking that this great command begins with the declaration that the Lord our God is one. One Lord – one Love – one Loyalty.

God can never be one – even a favourite one – among several deities.

In the land of Canaan there were many gods and you could choose what you wanted from some and try and get something else from others gods. The worship may have been demanding – but it was never exclusive! What was not normal or acceptable in the Land of Canaan was the idea that the god you worshipped was exclusive and the only God.

Does that not sound contemporary?

It is not now acceptable to say “Our God is the one true God”

It is a temptation to acknowledge with our mouths the uniqueness of our God but to get drawn to other modern deities that will make big demands upon us and lead to compromise and a divided heart.

We are to show our Love for the Lord by rejecting all rivals – whatever form those rivals take. Remember the first commandment – “You shall no other gods before me”. This is foundational and fundamental – if He is first then there can be no room for other rivals.

In fact – after all He has done for us – creating us, revealing Himself to us, graciously redeeming us – the only rightful response is:

“To Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength”

The one God is calling us this morning to Love Him with an undivided Love.

He is calling us to Love Him by receiving and applying His word to us into our hearts, and homes and community life.

He is calling us to Love Him by always remembering His Love and grace to us – Loving the giver more than we love the gifts.

He is calling us to Love Him by rejecting all other idols and instead to trust Him and to show that trust by being faithfully obedient.

So, let's Love with all our hearts, all our Soul and all our strength.