

“The Lord Alone is God”

³² “For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether *any great thing* like this has happened, or *anything* like it has been heard.³³ Did *any* people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? ³⁴ Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of *another* nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? ³⁵ To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself *is* God; *there is* none other besides Him. ³⁶ Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. ³⁷ And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, ³⁸ driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land *as* an inheritance, as *it is* this day. ³⁹ Therefore know this day, and consider *it* in your heart, that the LORD Himself *is* God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; *there is* no other. ⁴⁰ You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong *your* days in the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time.”

The book of Deuteronomy is a series of sermons by Moses to the people of Israel. They wandered through the wilderness for 40 years, but now they are getting ready to enter the promised land. Chapters 1-4 make up the first sermon from Moses to the people. In chapters 1-3, Moses retells the story of the people’s wanderings and some of their victories. In chapter 4, Moses draws the sermon to a conclusion with some application. In Deuteronomy 4:1-14, Moses calls the people to obedience, and in verses 15-31 there is a call to not have any idols or other gods. As we come to our text for this morning we see these same themes again highlighted. However, Moses’ main point is that the people need to concentrate on who the LORD is. Over and over again the people are reminded of who their Lord is. In fact, this is the heart of the text we are going to study this morning. Here is one sentence that summarizes what I think this passage is saying, “Moses called the people to obedience because of who the LORD is.” We, too, are called to obey the Lord and remember who he is.

I’ve heard many people say that God doesn’t require anything of us except faith in Jesus. We are taught that faith is not a work so we don’t have to “do” anything. The entire Christian life gets simplified to believing certain truths and a conversion experience. However, this does not fit with the New Testament’s idea of the Christian life. A casual reading of the letters of St. Paul should convince us that there is something to do in the Christian life beyond getting saved by believing in Jesus.

And yet, the Bible does affirm the simple gospel message that Jesus has accomplished a full and complete salvation for his people. We always want to affirm that Jesus' death on the cross is sufficient for our salvation. Our challenge is to see what obedience is and why we should obey God. Deuteronomy 4:32-40 helps give us an idea about why we as Christians should obey the commands of God and why obedience is a good thing. The message I want to convey to you this morning is "We should obey the Lord because of what he has done and who he is." My prayer is that this message will be an encouragement to you as you live the Christian life.

What has the Lord done? v.32-38

The central event of the Old Testament is the Exodus. Imagine living as a slave and then suddenly being liberated from one of the most powerful nations on earth without having to fight a battle. Moses has been reminding the people of Israel that the same God that rescued them from slavery has also brought them step by step through the wilderness. God spoke to Moses from the burning bush (v. 33), and he brought the people out of Egypt with mighty deeds (v. 34). Not only did God bring them out of Egypt in a miraculous way but God is the only deity that has ever done anything like this. In ancient traditions and even some modern religions, gods were considered to inhabit certain geographical regions. In other words, if you were from one place you believed in one deity, and if you were from another place you believed in a different deity. The God that brought the people of Israel out of Egypt is not like that. Moses says, "Has any other god done what the LORD has done?" The obvious answer is no. Most religions are also divided between the religious elites and the regular people. Some special people get access to the deity and everyone else gets all their information from the priests. It is not like that with the people of Israel. They heard God speaking from the mountain. They saw his fire (v. 36). In verse 35, Moses says that all of these miraculous things were done so that the people would know that there is only one Lord. That there is only one true God. Other religions have experiences and even some things that seem very supernatural, but no god has ever done what the One, True Lord has done. In verses 37-38, Moses tells the people two things. First, that the Lord has done these things because of covenant love and second, that he has a future for them. Covenant love is God's promise to protect the people, to provide for the people, to lead the people, and to make the people his own so he can live with them. God's covenant love does not have an expiration date. It is connected to God's eternal being (nature). So the future for the people of God is secure because of God's character. The people of God can have confidence in God doing what he has said he will do because of all the amazing things that he has already done for them. The covenant love of God that secures for God's people a future is something that Christians can relate to very easily. It is the same hope that the gospel gives us. Through Jesus, who he is and what he has done, Christians have had their own exodus. From slavery in sin to freedom in God's Kingdom. For 3 and a half years, the disciples witnessed miracles and listened to God's voice. Their teaching, the New Testament, is the same as the Old Testament was for the nation of Israel. It is the inspired record of God's actions for his people. Jesus has done the same kind of work that was done to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt. He has brought us out of the darkest night and has given us a home.

Who is the Lord?" v. 39

"The Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below." is a powerful line declaring who the Lord is. In your English Bible note the spelling of LORD. All capital letters right? In the Japanese Bible (主) is in bold type. This signifies, as I am sure you know, that the Hebrew Bible has the special name of God in those places. "YHWH" is God. He is God in heaven and on the earth. The Lord is not some regional power that reigns within the borders of a particular country. He is above all things. He rules in the heavenly realm and he rules on the earth. This was important for the Israelites to remember as they were about to go into battles with other nations. The other nations declared their right to the land they occupied by saying it was given to them by their gods. Their gods were going to fight for them. This is why when you read the Old Testament it says God fights for his people, or when you read about the prophets calling out to God to defend his own name when Israel was being attacked by a foreign army. The gods of the ancient world were the boundary keepers. The neighboring people lived within their own boundaries because their god was there.

The LORD is different. He is the true God. He rules everywhere. He created the world and everything in it. He controls the rise and fall of nations. He brought a nation into existence because he wanted to. How could there be something outside of his power if he created everything? There is no greater power or knowledge than God's. God is the highest ideal of goodness, truth, and beauty.

In verse 39, Moses tells the people to "lay it to your heart." What does he mean? The Lord is this great and high God. Our knowledge of God does not change who he is, but it does change our experience of everyday life. What kind of difference do you think it would make in your life if you committed to live according to the truth that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below? That God is the ruler of all things. His power, knowledge, goodness, truth, and beauty are perfect. Theological ideas like this seem like they make no difference in everyday life. I don't think a confidence in God's power will stop you from tripping and falling on the sidewalk. I don't think trusting in God's knowledge will stop you from getting sick. This confidence did not stop the people of Israel from having to fight battles in the promised land. However, the battles that we face in life don't stand much of a chance against the God who has the power to create a nation. We "lay it to our hearts" when we put our confidence in God instead of our circumstances--when our first thought in a tough situation is that God is good, loves his people, and is in control of all things. That the same God who gave his own Son to die on our behalf is not likely to abandon us when things are hard for us. This call to "lay it to your hearts" was made by Moses when the people were preparing to enter into the land of Canaan. The people needed to be reminded again and again to look to the Lord for their support because they were entering a season of battles that were spiritual as well as physical. Their real life wars were spiritual battles because it demonstrated whether or not they were going to take the commands of the Lord seriously. Recalling who the LORD is as they went into the land that the LORD promised to them was key to possessing the land. Our connection to the historical situation of this text is a bit remote. However, the call to put full confidence in the LORD is not remote to us. It is an essential component of the Christian life. We look at the person and work of our Lord Jesus. God incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He was completely and fully divine and yet completely and fully human. He lived a sinless life of total obedience to the Father. He died sacrificially according to the plan of God. He was resurrected from the dead. He

ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He sent the Holy Spirit as our comforter and guide. He forgives us of our sins and makes us right with the Father. Look to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith and remember who he is and what he has done (Hebrews 12:2). When the struggles of this life seem to press in on you, think about all that the Triune God has done, is doing, and will do. All of our worrying, fears, sorrows, and labors in this life will pass away in an instant anyway. What power does rejection or temptation have over the Almighty God? Lay it in your heart then that our Lord Jesus is for us, his precious people.

“We should obey the Lord.” v. 40

“Therefore you should obey his statutes and commandments.” I hope that the connection between the works and identity of God and our obedience is obvious to you. The Almighty, Triune God has saved the people of Israel and is about to bring them into the promised land. The people should therefore obey his commands. God loves his people and has already saved them so they should obey his commands as his people. They are under his rule, and they are called by his name. They are his children. This same idea applies to us as Christians. We belong to him, he loves us, therefore we should obey. Yet the struggle we have is to find out what commands we need to obey. There were many laws in the Old Testament and there are commands in the New Testament. Jesus summarizes the law and the prophets in Matthew 22:34-40, commanding us to love God and to love our neighbor. We could spend a lot of time thinking about them, and it would be profitable for us to do so. However, I think Jesus was emphasizing that we should seek to live out the grace and love that we have been shown in him. There is no need for you to earn anything from God. There is no need for you to obey God’s laws to satisfy his demands. Our Lord Jesus has done all of that for us. We obey because the Triune God is real. He is holy. He is just. He is almighty. He has done so many things for us. He is patient with us. He is merciful to us. Because of all the love we have been given by God, we love him by listening to what he says. We worship the One, True God by walking the path of wisdom and humility. We imitate our Savior.

The last half of verse 40 says, “that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.” This part of the verse seems to say that if we obey God’s commandments then we will live a long life, but we must remember that the people of Israel were on the verge of entering a land to conquer it. We are not in the same position. However, the principle holds for us as it did for the Israelites. If we are careful to obey the commandments of God we will live a relatively blessed and wise life. Obeying the voice of God is certain to give us wisdom for everyday life. It will certainly help us make hard choices. It will not likely keep us accident free nor will we be guaranteed a life longer than our neighbors. The people of Israel were not receiving a promise to live a maximum number of years, but rather the assurance that God will not put on them the curses of the Law if they obey God’s commands. The curses of the Law were fulfilled in various ways in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament era we have confidence in the Lord Jesus for all of our needs. The “Lord disciplines those he loves” is an assurance that even in the rough times we are not far from God or his grace.

Obedience and faith: concluding thoughts

We are never far from God as Christians. We have the Holy Spirit guiding us. We have prayer. We have God's Word. We have the church. God is near to you. Have you ever heard anyone say, "I don't feel very close to God," or maybe, "God seems distant?" Our experience tells us that we can be far from the Lord. We ask ourselves if we are really walking with the Lord. I think it weakens our confidence in the everyday grace that we receive from God. The Bible, prayer, the church, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Holy Spirit are abundant gifts that we don't have to earn. They are all gifts and they draw us close to God. More than anything else I think we should remember that our current feelings do not alter the real grace we have already received as believers. On the other hand, I think the feeling of being distant from God is connected to our obedience to God's commands. We can see this play out in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve disobeyed in the Garden, and they hid themselves from God. They had no assurance that God would clothe them like he did. But we have the assurance of the Word of God that he will forgive us and restore us if we confess our sins.

The Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the One, True God. Creator of all things and the redeemer of mankind. Our Lord Jesus sacrificed himself for us. We have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Christ (Col 1:13). We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom that is already here in the church and will be fully revealed one day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:9-11). If you hold on to Christ and his love for you, then it should become easier and easier to want to obey his command to love God and love your neighbor. But my encouragement to you this morning is not to keep beating yourself up for past failures or timid obedience. No, instead, what I urge you to do is to remember the Lord Jesus. Who is he? What did he do? Hold on to that and live your life in obedience to him.