

The Good Life

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[0 : 00] Well, please keep your Bibles open to that chapter in Deuteronomy. Give me a minute to set up. I had an idea during the week, actually, to have a bit of a Q&A; session at the end of this.

And then I thought of a better idea. Paul Barker is actually going to be here next week, so why don't you save your questions for him? No, actually, I'm more than happy to take questions over supper at the end.

We won't have a Q&A; time, but if there are questions for Paul, you can ask him next week as well. He'll be joining us and preaching to us. Well, let me pray as we start. Dear God, we just ask that tonight you will open your word to us, that we might hear it, and that your spirit will help us to obey it.

We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. As usual, there's a bit of a handout in the notices, so if you want to take it out and use that as a bit of a guide, that might be helpful.

Well, there comes a time in life when all boys and girls grow up, and they have to decide for themselves what they're going to do with their lives. What goals are they going to have?

[1 : 19] What are they going to get out of life? What is their picture of the good life? Up to then, their parents, by and large, would have made those decisions for them.

But the days of living off mom and dad are coming to an end, and it's time for them to chart their own destiny. Well, I think some of you might remember that in your distant past, or maybe not so distant past.

Some of you might be thinking, I can't wait for that day to come. Others might be dreading that day when your mom's going to say, yep, time to pack up and leave home.

Well, here in Deuteronomy, the people of Israel have reached a similar point in their lives, not as individuals, but as a group, as a people. Moses, their father, their spiritual father, has brought them to the edge of the promised land, but he himself is not going to go in with them.

This is a land that will be full of promise, but also contains certain threats. And he wants to leave them with some important parting words as they enter.

[2 : 27] And so the book of Deuteronomy records those parting words. If you look at your outline there, the book is actually divided into three speeches, by and large, with the chapter's references on the left.

One, the first one, recounting Israel's track record and God's faithfulness to them before they've arrived to this point. The second speech, by and large, containing the law and the requirements of the law.

And then the third speech, a short one, which is the renewal of God's covenant with them. And then at the end, we have a bit of an ending where Moses hands on the leadership to Joshua.

He sings a song, and then he dies. Well, the passage we're going to look at tonight is going to be part of the second speech, which is the longest, and which relates to keeping the law. And so as we look at this chapter in a bit more detail, I want you to put yourself in the shoes of someone that was there that day.

I'm standing there in the desert. Well, for a start, if you're over 60 years in age, well, you wouldn't have been there because you would have been dead. Sorry for anyone who's above 60.

[3 : 42] If you were under 40 years old, you wouldn't have been born the last time you were there and about to enter the land. As for me, well, I would have only been a year old, probably in my mother's arms, or probably sort of chewing dirt, crawling around on the ground.

The experience of the last 40 years, I think, for the people would have been fresh in their minds. And if you think about it, 40 years is a long time. You know, if you compare it to ourselves, that's as far back as 1972.

I had to think about footy. You know, even Richmond managed to win a premiership in 1980. You know, and that was 30, 32 years ago. Anyway, you'd be standing there.

You'd be thinking about the time you've been, last 40 years, sleeping in tents, moving from one desert plain to another, eating manna and quail for breakfast, for lunch, for dinner.

And actually, I was thinking, just a bit of digression. I had a great idea for a cookbook the other day. And I've actually got it on the screen here. It's going to be called Desert Delights.

[4 : 52] 101 Quail and Manna Recipes. And here's a few of the recipes. First one, bread and bird pudding.

It gets worse. Second one, bird in a bun. Third one, roast quail, lightly salted, stuffed with manna.

Next one, quail soup with crusty manna roll. Crumb, quail, schnitzel is the third one. I've got sweet corn. I don't know whether there's sweet corn in the desert.

Anyway. And the last one, which I think Dave would love, it's the high quality burger. Anyway.

We've gathered here, ready to listen to Moses. And Moses would have just recited the Ten Commandments. And now he's about to issue God's commandment for a new generation.

[5 : 51] But first, before he does that, he has a bit of a preamble. And those are the first three verses of chapter 6. And so he says, Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the ordinances, that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.

Hear, therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

And so the first thing to say is that what we hear here is not just Moses' words, not just the words of an old man, but God's word. Just as on Sinai, Moses is going to be God's mouthpiece.

And it is going to be an enduring word. That is a word not just for this generation, but for their children and their children's children. The commandments, as I said, is not going to be in these first three verses.

It actually comes straight after. But Moses tells them that what they are to do with it is to hear and observe diligently. And so here we have in verse 1 Moses' responsibility, which is to teach them to observe it.

[7 : 19] And then in response, the people's responsibility is to hear and observe and obey in verse 3. And actually it's going to be a pattern that they will follow later as between them and their children.

And tied to this obedience are explicit promises. Promises that they will live long in verse 2, that they will increase greatly, verse 3, and then in verse 3 again, that they would enjoy this land flowing with milk and honey.

It was meant to be a reminder of the Garden of Eden of Genesis 1. It's a picture really of the good life that God is going to give them.

But in order to get to this good life, they are to hear and observe diligently the commandments that God is about to give them. And the heart of the commandments is actually found in verses 4 to 9.

So as we moved on, we see not just from verse 4 to 9, but actually the heart or the very heart of the heart of these commandments is verse 4 and 5. As we shall see, verses 10 to 25 is actually going to be an elaboration of these few verses that we have here.

[8 : 34] And so we read in verse 4, Hear, O Lord. And again, Moses is reinforcing verse 3, the need to hear. Hear, O Israel. Sorry.

Hear, O Israel. The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Now these couple of verses are what the Jews call the Shema, which in Hebrew means to hear. And there are actually two statements here. One is the premise and the other one is the commandment.

Moses gives them the reason for their obedience or reason why they should obey before giving them the commandment itself. And so the premise is the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.

And there are two aspects to this premise. The first is that the Lord, Yahweh, is God's covenant name. It's the name that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush.

[9 : 35] And it is a name which establishes God's relationship with Israel. Yahweh will be their God and they will be Yahweh's treasured possession.

And so as we now jump to, you know, verse 4 to 9 being the summary and then 10 to 25 being the elaboration, as we now jump to verse 10 and 12, Moses elaborates on what this means.

And he says, when the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not feel, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant, and when you have eaten your fill, take care that you do not forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

And so what Moses is saying is that this is the same God, Yahweh, who swore to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and promised them this very land that they are about to enter.

It is the same God that Yahweh, this Yahweh, who has rescued them out of Egypt because he remembered his promises to their forefathers.

[10 : 54] And so Israel and God actually go back a long way. And this relationship that God has with his people has been sustained through all these years by God's faithfulness, God's commitment to his promises, and God's determination to stick to those promises.

So that's the first aspect. The second is that this God, Yahweh, is to be Israel's God alone. Yahweh alone, Yahweh and no other God.

And so now if we jump again to verse 13 and 15, which is the follow-on from verse 12, we read, that the Lord your God you shall fear, Him you shall fear, and by His name alone you shall swear.

Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the people who are all around you, because the Lord your God who is present with you is a jealous God. The anger of the Lord your God would be kindled against you, and He would destroy you from the face of the earth.

And so here we have elaboration of Yahweh wanting them to be loyal to Him and Him alone. Here we see the inklings of some of the dangers that will lurk for them when they get into the land, that there will be other gods there that will entice them away from Yahweh.

[12 : 15] Here too we see the warnings for disobedience, that God would destroy them from the face of this earth. But you see, Yahweh is a jealous God.

He has committed Himself to Israel alone, and He needs Israel to reciprocate. In other words, a covenant relationship is an exclusive relationship.

And so this translates very naturally into the commandment itself. Once they know who the Lord is and what He has done for them, the commandment then is given that you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

And most of you will know that this is the commandment which Jesus says is on which the entire law hangs. And actually, it's quite interesting because when you look back to verse 1, it says here, now this is the commandment.

It's actually in the singular. And then He says, the statutes and the ordinances and the ordinances, i.e. the law. So there's a singular commandment on which the law hangs, just as Jesus said.

[13 : 25] Well, what does it mean to love with all your heart and soul and strength? I used to think, and I think it's quite a common understanding that these three things are actually different aspects of a person.

It's actually sort of a Greek way of thinking. I think we've got a slide up there which shows that heart, soul, and strength actually treat different things.

But I think the Hebrew way of understanding it is to see that what is happening is that what God is asking is for the inner, from the inner to the outer is the transformation.

The love is to start from the inner and then proceed to the outer. And so the heart is what's inside a person. The soul, in Hebrew, is actually representative of the whole person itself and then the strength is all your resources, everything that you've got within your control.

And so the implication here is that our love is to be a wholehearted love. All the love, all that we have, we are to use to love the Lord. So God is saying that not only are they not to have other gods, i.e.

[14 : 36] to have divided loyalty, but they are not to withhold anything from God himself. That is to have a total or absolute loyalty. It's a loyalty that would permeate every part of their lives.

Which means that Israel could not just obey externally without the inner motivation. In fact, that's what legalism is. And that's something that the Lord condemns again and again in the rest of the Old Testament.

when they offered sacrifices without actually having the inner, having the inner, the heart that is right before God. And so if you turn to verse 16 to 19, it spells out a bit more specifically what this love looks like in practice.

It says, Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you tested him in Massa. You must diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees and the statutes that he has commanded.

Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord so that it may go well with you and so that you may go in and occupy the good land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you, thrusting out all your enemies from before you as the Lord has promised.

[15 : 54] And so what God is asking is for total loyalty to him and a continued trust in him and him alone for their well-being.

And now let's move on to verse 6 to 9. In a sense, I think this is sort of a further instruction, a bit of an ancillary instruction that follows on from the main commandment.

And so Moses says, Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Again, a reinforcing of what he's already said. And then he goes on to say in verse 7, Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Bind them as a sign on your hand. Fix them as an emblem on your forehead and write them on the doorpost of your house and on your gates. Since, in one sense, a bit over the top, as if everything and anything needs to be a reminder of God's law.

But I think what Moses is trying to get them to do is to try and instill within themselves and within the next generation a love for God which arises from the heart.

[17 : 11] For you see, after this generation, the children that come after wouldn't probably themselves experience the rescue from Egypt or even their entry into Jordan.

They wouldn't see all the miracles but they are still to know that God had rescued them and actually rescued their parents for their benefit. And so, in verse 20, Moses gives a scenario of what might happen.

If you turn and he says that when your children ask you in time to come, what is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord, our God, has commanded you, and they would ask this question because you've been reciting and reminding them of this, then you shall say to your children, we were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

The Lord displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. He brought us out from there in order to bring us in to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors.

Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes to fear the Lord our God for our lasting good so as to keep us alive as is now the case. If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God as he has commanded us, we will be in the right.

[18 : 37] For you see, Moses was well aware of the dangers that would come when they entered the land. For example, in verse 11, that they would forget God when they have eaten their fill or that they would be enticed by other gods around them.

And actually, if we stop to think, there's a lot of parallels with our own lives, isn't there? When times are good and then when we're tempted away from God.

And so Moses himself wouldn't be around. He's going to die to keep reminding them. And so in a sense, the responsibility now falls to the parents. They become, as it were, little Moseses passing on the law to the next generation, just as Moses has passed the law or given the law to them.

Every generation has a duty to pass on the faith to the next generation. Well, that's sort of the passage in summary. And I want to just right now spend some time thinking it through as far as application is concerned.

And so the first thing I want to say is I wonder whether you notice this recurring pattern that's not just in this chapter but actually in the whole of Deuteronomy where Moses is continually recalling God's past grace in order to call for obedience and continued trust in God.

[20 : 03] So I don't know whether you've noticed but for example Deuteronomy chapter 5 is not a new giving of the Ten Commandments in that sense. If you read what's happened is that Moses was actually recounting the incident back in Exodus.

He's saying remember when God gave you the Ten Commandments then. So he's not actually giving it a fresh noun but he was reminding them of the law that was given at Sinai. And in the same way the three speeches speech one was about recounting the past what God had done how he had been faithful and then giving them the law in speech two and then in speech three sort of renewing the covenant with them.

So there's always a past in order to call for obedience now so that they can look forward to God's continual blessing in the future. And one of the John Piper if some of you know him calls this faith in future grace.

And he's actually written a book about it. The long title is the purifying power of living by faith in future grace. grace. And for me that was a really sort of important book in helping me to understand the motivation for living the Christian life.

And that is that our faith is not motivated by trying to repay God for his past goodness as if we could or to try and earn our future blessing.

[21 : 25] But rather it is continuing to rely by faith in future grace. And so Piper gives an illustration in his book where he says that past grace or bygone grace is the foundation for faith in future grace.

Past grace he says is continually accumulating every day. And so if you can picture there's a reservoir, an invisible reservoir of future grace which we can't see, which is flowing back through us, through the present, into an ever-growing pool of past grace.

That reservoir in front of us is invisible except for God's promises. But the pool of past grace is visible. And it's that which gives us strength to continue to trust in God.

So that is when we are being asked to exercise faith, to trust in him, what we need to do is look back and see all the times that God has already blessed us and shown his grace to us so that then we can turn back and go, yes, because he's done that in the past, he will continue to do that into the future.

So that's the first point. The second point is actually a question and it's this. I wonder whether if you read through this, whether you think that it was going to be hard or easy for Israel to obey the law.

[22 : 54] That is, would it have been easy or hard for them to love the Lord with all their hearts, their soul and their strength? I mean, again, imagine yourself standing there as one of them, in the desert, with your tents flapping in the wind, and thinking back over the 40 years, what you've just gone through, and why it's taken that long to get to this point again.

And then looking to the land and hearing all the promises of blessing that would come. I don't know about you, but I would have thought that loving the Lord your God would have been easy.

I mean, why wouldn't you, given what's just passed and what's going to be promised in the future? How hard could it be to love the Lord, to love someone who's blessed you and given you and rescued you and done so much for you?

Well, actually, Moses didn't think it was that difficult, because in chapter 30, and you might want to turn with me to that, he actually says the law that is being given to you is not hard.

So chapter 30, verse 11. Surely this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven that you should say, who will go up to heaven for us and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe?

[24 : 22] Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say, who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it? No, the word is very near to you.

It is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. And yet, for Israel, all it took was for one generation before they started to forget God.

And that's what, if you read Judges, that's what Judges is all about. They failed to pass on the law. They ate their fill and forgot about God and they started to follow other gods.

And again, amazingly, God predicted that this would happen too. So if you just turn the page in chapter 31 and verse 16, he says to Moses, Soon you will lie down with your ancestors, then this people will begin to prostitute themselves to the foreign gods in their midst, the gods of the land into which they are going.

They will forsake me, breaking my covenant that I have made with them. And so then Moses passes it down to them in verse 27, for I know well how rebellious and stubborn you are.

[25 : 29] If you already have been so rebellious towards the Lord while I'm still alive among you, how much more after my death? And so Moses writes this song in chapter 32 as a witness against them.

God is true in his word and therefore judges them in their disobedience as well, just as he promised in Deuteronomy.

It was meant to be easy, but it proved to be too hard. Well, as Andrew mentioned last week, it is only Jesus when he came that succeeded to obey all of Deuteronomy.

And actually, there's no coincidence that the three quotations that Jesus uses when he was tempted by Satan was from this very book, and two of them were actually from chapter 6. friends.

And by being obedient to the law, Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of Deuteronomy, not just for himself, but for all who trust in him. Friends, I don't think we're any better than Israel.

[26 : 39] And so it is only those of us who trust in Jesus to fulfill the law for them that we too will be blessed according to the promises of Deuteronomy.

Not by what we do, but by what Jesus has done for us. And what's more, those who trust in him now also have the gift of the Spirit, so that what was impossible for Israel to do, to love the Lord with all their heart, is now possible for us to do by his Spirit.

Which brings me, I think, to my last point, which is that how we are to do this is to continue to hear God's word and to obey it. That is how the Spirit works, using God's word already spoken and recorded and then continuing to speak it to us afresh to call us to obedience.

That is the thrust of the other reading tonight in Hebrews 4. Over and over again in Hebrews chapter 3 and 4, the writer says, Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

Today, being the time when God speaks again through his word and we hear God's voice again. Today, when we hear by the Spirit, then let us obey, because the promise is that we would enter not just a land, physical land, but God's very own rest, and that we can remain in his rest until Jesus comes again.

[28 : 14] So, brothers and sisters, hear, hear, O Israel, us being Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your strength and all your soul.

Let me pray. Father, we thank you that you are a speaking God and that you are clear in what you've asked us to do, that your word is not hidden from us, neither is it too hard for us to understand.

And we thank you that in Christ Jesus, we are righteous before you, not because of what we've done, but because of what Jesus has done by fulfilling the law for us, so that all the blessings of the good life is for us to enjoy because of Jesus.

And we thank you too for your spirit given to us, dwelling among us, dwelling in us, that gives us the ability to love you with all our heart, so that the law itself can be written in our hearts by the spirit.

So thank you, Lord, and we pray that even as we hear your word, help us to obey. In the precious name of Jesus, we ask. Amen.