

A Democratic Election

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[0 : 00] I'm going off to Toronto this weekend and I won't be back next Wednesday and Dave Dewart is going to take over and talk.

Dave is an assistant professor of biblical studies at Regent College and his specialty is Hebrew and the Old Testament. So I told him to make sure you know what Deuteronomy is all about.

But he's a, I really want you to get behind him and give him a lot of support and encouragement because he's a fairly diffident self-effacing young fellow with an enormous amount of ability.

And so do make him very welcome with you next week when he comes to talk to you. I'd love to say some really positive things about politics.

It's not as hard as you think. I was very impressed with the love which seemed to be held for Audrey McLaughlin up in the Yukon.

[1 : 13] The rest of the country may not think much of her, but there she was and they obviously love her very much. So that was impressive to me. I was very impressed with Kim Campbell accepting defeat.

I thought she had lots of guts as a lady doing that. And Jean Chrétien, who's our prime minister designate, the thing is that he's an old man.

And I've come to think that older men over 60 really probably do know most of the answers. So I am.

And coming from Protestant Tory Toronto, as it once it was, I guess, can you imagine my amazement that Herb Dallawal, who's ethnically East Indian, defeated King Kong Wan, who's ethnically Chinese, in one of the main writings in Vancouver?

I think that's, I really am impressed that that kind of thing can happen here. I'm not sure if it could happen in many parts of the world. But that's, so I, those are all the good things I want to say about politics.

[2 : 39] And you don't have to agree with me. This is just really to get your attention to the things I want to talk about a little later. The other great event of the past week is that Toronto the good beat the city of brotherly love.

Neither of which are noted for being either good or brotherly.

But it really is, you know, seek ye first the kingdom of God. As far as the kingdoms of this world are concerned, I don't suppose there is any higher attainment than hitting a home run in the last half of the night.

And, you know, I mean, what else is there after that? So that seemed to me important.

I was helped by two quotes from Chuck Colson, who was, I mean, I found this a fairly helpful thing for him to say, that he quoted Samuel Johnson.

[3 : 53] Listen, I want to just give you a brief illustration of it because it's easy to do. But that's a part of the heart.

And he said, he quoted Samuel Johnson, who said, how small of all the human heart, that all that human hearts endure, that part which kings or laws can cause or cure.

That in terms of the whole of our life, what kings and laws do, what politics does is really quite small. And he quoted how the 20th century is the pathetic story of the effort to live by the bread of political power alone, which is another Deuteronomy statement, which, or a takeoff on a Deuteronomy statement.

And that in an age which is an age of materialism and an age of reason, the coming to grips with the reality of not living by bread alone, or by the bread of political power alone, or seeing our world as one in which we think that the deepest needs of all our hearts can be met by the political system that we live under, and that just doesn't work.

So there's lots to think about and pray about, and even some things I think to be thankful for in the events of the past week. This week's text, which, as you may or may not know, is called A Democratic Election, refers to what went on, not last Monday, but what went on about a little over 3,000 years ago, when it looks like Moses put together the whole idea.

[6 : 09] We set our riding boundaries. We have our nomination meetings. We listen to party rivalries. We see the election preparation in terms of image projecting.

And then we come to the voting. And then we ask the question, what have we done? And that's the way we set up our political structure.

So it's interesting to use that as a kind of screen through which to look at the passage that we're reading today, in which you have a somewhat different situation.

I'm not really comparing the two, but you can see how the pattern of one emerges out of the other. The thing I think that you need to be particularly aware of, just as you read this passage, is that Moses is a very particular kind of leader.

And I think some of the problems that we have in the world is that people use Moses as a kind of prototype. He is a unique person in the whole of history, I think, and I think that you'd have to agree with that after you read about him.

[7 : 29] The difficulty is that a lot of religious leaders in the egomania and arrogance which besets all religious leaders tend to think of themselves as another Moses.

He's the one that communicated with God. He's the one that formed... He's the one that challenged Pharaoh. He's the one that led them out through the Red Sea, through the wilderness.

He was a completely unique person in history who spoke face-to-face with God. And people who, in their arrogance and sense of self-importance, think they're doing that, I think become religious tyrants who do a terrible amount of damage, and yet people accept it because they think they have in Moses a kind of prototype and that they're following through that prototype.

So when you read this story, remember that Moses is a very unusual person, quite unique, so that the New Testament says there was Moses and he was the greatest until Jesus came along.

Moses built the house, but Jesus owned it. And you get that...

[8 : 52] So that I think you need to understand how important a person Moses is in the whole picture of things. Then you see, what he does is he turns to these people in the first chapter, in the tenth verse, and says, the Lord God has increased your numbers so that today you are as many as the stars in the sky.

And that today is not an accidental reference because it's a kind of continuing continuing Old Testament reference to the fact that God is the God of the present moment.

God is the God of today. And you see the evidence of God's promises and the fulfillment of those promises in the circumstances in which you find yourself today.

You are as many as the stars in the sky. And that the last book of the five books of Moses goes back to the first book of Moses where Abraham stood one night in the desert outside of his tent and the Lord said to him, look up to the heavens and count the stars.

If indeed you can count them. Then he said to him, so shall your offspring be. By the time of Moses and the end of the first five books, that promise has been fulfilled.

[10 : 18] And Moses says to them, you are as many as the stars in the sky. So God has wonderfully prospered them all through the trials and tribulations of their lives.

Then he goes on to say to them, there is a wearying and burdensome problem that exists.

Though God has increased you as he has promised he would, how can I bear your wearying problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself?

Now, you know how inevitable this is. I mean, every one of us is almost on the point of suing our neighbor.

I mean, that's because we're told to love our neighbors and it's not that easy. And most of us are, you know, on the verge of being involved in litigation and it breaks out between people all the time.

[11 : 27] It's a massive business. The whole center of the city is taken up by the courthouse in Vancouver because it's a massive business, keeping people in some kind of continuing, working relationship with one another without one person destroying another, dealing with all the things that go on.

And so as these people increased, so these burdens increased. And Moses says, I can't handle it. How can I bear your wearying problems, your burdens, and all the legislative disputes that you

have?

He's not complaining. He's just saying something has to be done. And so he says to them, choose some wise, understanding, and respected men from among each of your tribes and I will set them over you.

So this is, in a sense, the gathering together and saying, who are we going to put forward? Put the wisest, the most understanding, the most respected people in each of your different tribes.

Give me their names. Show me who they are. Tell me who they are. And of course, that kind of shakedown happens in every community. It could happen here. If we could all stay together for a week, we'd begin to see who the wise and respected people are among us, people who could give leadership and who could take responsibility.

[13:02] And of course, that happens in the business firm in which you live, that happens in your community. That kind of process happens. I'm not sure that politically it happens when, in our society, but it's what's meant to happen.

That the best people, their names are to be given to Moses and Moses does the appointing and selecting. And he says in verse 14, you said to this suggestion that you think it's a good idea. And because some method has to be worked out wherever people are gathered together as to how they are going to choose to govern themselves. And you know that this is, I mean, one of the big problems of the Clayquot Sound is that a lot of, I think, righteously indignant people are saying, there is a political process and if you want to change things, get involved.

And then the answer comes back, the political process is dominated by multinational corporations against which we have no power. Therefore, the political process is powerless.

Therefore, we don't want to be, we don't want to be governed in that way. We want some different kind of government, some different kind of rule. And so this, the, the, the kind of flux that Moses sees here, and when he makes the suggestion and they say this is a good suggestion, nobody, I don't think, has come along yet and made a suggestion as to how we could handle the problems of this country at the moment or how it practically can be done.

[14:47] So, Moses goes on in verse 15 and says, I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have authority over you.

So you see that the, Moses from among those who were put forward said, I want this person and this person and this person and this person. I want you to divide yourself up into thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.

I want these people to be in charge. And what else, the other thing that I want is I want them to have authority. And that meant that not only when you come with your dispute against your brother and you have to submit to the person who is in authority over you because you're no longer going to be able to come to me, Moses said, you're going to have to submit to the judgment that he passes. But not only are you going to have to do that, we are going in to claim a new land. And that same person is over you in terms of the military enterprise that we're engaged in.

So that there's got to be some kind of military obedience to the person who is over you. You've got to be willing to obey the person whom you have chosen and who has been selected and appointed and put in charge of you.

[16:15] So you see the development of the structure of the community as they set these people up. I charged your judges and the judges were not just judicial in their function but were also military in their function.

Hear the dispute between your brothers and judge fairly whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an alien.

So you begin to discover the sort of doctrine of human rights that was built into the system that a brother Israelite could sue a brother Israelite and they could get judgment from the person who was set to be the judge over them and that judge was to deal with the same kind of impartiality with an alien who went up against the citizen.

You can see that that tension is still a tension in our society. One of the serious tensions in our society that that should happen. The feeling that that needs to happen.

it's a it's a it's a I think it's quite an unusual kind of problem as to how you how you do maintain that kind of impartial justice.

[17:43] But Moses says that that's what you must do. And in verse 17 goes on to say do not show partiality in judging here both small and great alike do not be afraid of anyone for judgment belongs to God.

Now what he was doing there is quite a unique thing. I mean it's something for us to think about. You know when we say I mean you have newspaper headlines all the time saying judgment belongs to the big corporations or judgment belongs to the elite. Or judgment belongs to the power group. Or judgment belongs to wealth. Moses says no it doesn't. Judgment belongs to God. And the judge is to recognize that he is under the judgment of God and that he exercises the judgment of God in hearing both small and great alike. In not being afraid of anyone. Being fearless because he is in that position. this is why Canadians always argue with Americans who elect their judges. We have rightly or wrongly the sense that judges should be appointed by God and they think they have to be elected.

[19 : 13] And we think there's a difference. So whether that's true or not it's something you have to investigate. But that's what Moses tells them is that judgment belongs to God.

And what he's doing is establishing an absolute principle of divine authority in that judgment belongs to God.

and this gives people at least a certain sense that ultimately justice will be done.

It doesn't matter that the courts cannot ultimately defeat God. That they are held. And I mean what it's that same principle you see that happens when Paul is in chains before the king and he says you know that he says to the judge I would that you wear even as I am except for these chains because he recognized that his life was not subject to the authority of that power his life was subject to the authority of a greater power.

And that I think essentially is part of this story here. You know it's that that power can affect us in some way part of our life but the massive part of our life it can't affect because our life is lived under God and we live recognizing that judgment ultimately belongs to God and the God of all the world is just.

[21 : 08] He is not capricious. He is not partial. He is a just God and we accept his judgment on our lives no matter what happens.

So that when difficult and hard circumstances break into your life this recognition is still that judgment belongs to God and that you come to terms with it in the recognition that the judge of all the earth will do right.

And so this ends with setting up the supreme court but that only is in effect as long as Moses is there when he says bring me any cases too hard for you and I will hear it.

Now this may be some temptation to you to go and read Deuteronomy for yourself because much of the central part of Deuteronomy is establishing certain legal precedents and how you handle all sorts of quite intriguing situations how you exercise capital punishment how you deal with the breakdown of the law and the society and it is practical to the point of being quite embarrassing in some of the things I mean it tells you about digging latrines and things like that as part of how you maintain society so you can see that he is setting up in one sense a practical order for the whole of the life of the nation and then teaching them that this whole structure this whole judicial structure comes under the authority of God himself and that

God is the ultimate judge now what you get out of that which I just need to tell you is that one of the cries that goes up through much of the Old Testament and particularly in the Psalms is the difficulty of getting justice I mean a senior judge in this very city said to me that getting justice is way too expensive it belongs to just an elite group who can pay for it most people can't pay for it and therefore they can't get it and the the validity of a system is that it can bring justice to the disputes between people on some kind of basis that is practical that it's not going to be delayed for four years but that it's going to be done and the health and vitality of a society means that it very much needs to be done it's one of the basic principles and therefore it's encouraging to recognize that God is the judge and that what

[24 : 47] God has done he has done in order that when you get to the New Testament it says that there are many instances in which it's better for you not to go to court at all not to depend on that system because of the special relationship you have to God through faith in Jesus Christ and what it does then is establish this sort of basic fact that God is the judge and that we all ultimately come before him and he brings judgment on our lives we all recognize that we all when we recognize that we all tend to feel guilty and inadequate I think or else we become hypocritical and pharisaical in our in the development of our own self righteousness but you see the purpose of loving the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength is that you live in the constant presence of the

judge and you see your life as being subject to the judgment of God on a continuing basis that you can say almighty

God unto whom all hearts be open all desires known from whom no secrets are hid the case is open it's a public case as far as God is concerned and there is nothing hidden and there is nothing secret and you live your life with that consciousness well the intriguing thing with which I just want to try and bring this together as Moses sets up the practical system of judgment as he comes down on the principle that God that judgment ultimately belongs to God that there's there's two things that happen one is that along comes Jesus who is the supreme legislator over and higher than Moses it is so that you have that and then you have the fact that the same one who is the judge is also the accused and so that

I mean this is the paradoxical reality that lies at the heart of the Christian faith is that the one who is judge becomes the one who is the accused and he is the one on whom the accusation on whom the accusation is of whom the accusation is made he is also the one who bears our sins in his body on the tree he is the penalty bearer he is the condemned the accused and condemned one and then you come to that wonderful verse in and remember the context for this the wonderful verse in in Acts 17 where Paul is describing to the philosophers of Athens the kind of street debaters of Athens the people who meet and discuss things by the hour

Paul goes among them and says to them that they have made that they have made images of gold and silver they have designed them and in their skill they have produced them and they call them their gods and that is the kind of high achievement but then Paul goes on to say in the past God overlooked such ignorance our setting up our own gods he says in the past God overlooked that but now he commands everybody everywhere to repent for he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice that he tells them as he tells

I mean I think this message must be for the whole population of the whole planet in every generation that there is a time when he will that God will set a day when he will judge the world with justice I mean our commitment to justice in our society at least vocally is very big indeed and it's because we think that there is an absolute principle of divine authority that underlies the whole of human existence and that we all come under the judgment of God but see what happens is in the last section of that he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man whom he has appointed he has given proof of this to all by raising that man from the dead so that the accused becomes the judge of all the earth he is the one by whom we are judged and that the ultimate reality of our human existence is not that we won't be misunderstood and mistreated by our fellow human beings within a judicial or political or military system but that the ultimate judgment belongs to the one who was is the condemned and betrayed one he is the one whom

[31 : 09] God has appointed to be the judge of all the earth and God has demonstrated this for all of history by raising him from the dead so you see how into the very fiber and structure of our daily life and our political system there is the reality of God's judgment and the fulfillment of that purpose in the death of Jesus Christ by which he becomes the one who is qualified as he is raised from the dead to be the judge he is the one before whom we live our lives and in whom we see the ultimate justice of God let me say a prayer our God as we have just been through this election and we wonder what it means and we probably have loaded the system with far greater expectations than it can ever meet grant that we as a people and that we as individuals may recognize that we don't live by bread alone but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God that we come under the judgment of God this judgment is born up by

Jesus Christ who has been the accused standing in the place where we stand in order that God might exalt him to be judge of all the earth help us our God to bring our lives under his judgment and by your Holy Spirit to live in such relationship to him that we might be in the presence of him who is just who is truth and who is love we ask this in his name amen here we are hi how are you nice to see you can I just get that quote on Samuel Johnson again I'm on Barrage Street Harry just out in a car I'll be out in just a few minutes okay there it is where is it can you read my writing how small a part of all that human hearts endure that part how small of all that human hearts endure I just want to get this tape off of a young fellow here broom up