

The Law Of The Land

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[0 : 00] than to get up into the pulpit and preach what he himself was not going to listen to. And I had a real sort of crisis of listening to this passage this week, and I'll tell you about it as time goes by.

Now, the passage, I think, I'm almost computer illiterate, but not totally.

You know that we have the process of democracy, which we use to appoint leaders. We are in the condition as a land that we need a new...

We need to use this wonderful and mysterious process of a general election in order to identify that person who will be the leader of the country for the next four or five years.

You will know that the provincial liberal party spent the weekend choosing their leader and arrived at their choice in the person of the present mayor.

[1 : 32] In November, we will choose a new mayor for the city. Anglicans this month have to choose a new bishop. By the same mechanism of votes in a ballot box, the spiritual leader of the Diocese of New Westminster will be appointed.

There's a certain kind of problem about that that I have, and that is that we want God's appointment, and yet we do it by democratic election. Now, whether this is a way of advising God or how it works, I'm not sure.

But the general theory is that no matter what we vote for here, that God will overrule in the end result. Politicians aren't caught with that problem.

So that we live, I mean, if you look at the newspapers, we live in a continual crisis of leadership.

We want a leader who will take responsibility. I was fairly, I guess, very much struck by a statement, which I just heard, I guess it was out of context, but it's a very powerful statement by T.S. Eliot, who said that what we're trying to do in our society is to create a society so perfect that nobody has to behave.

[3 : 09] You know, in other words, that we can unload onto our leadership and onto that all the responsibility, and then we can do whatever we like. We're getting close.

But we're not there yet, and it may not work when you come right down to it. So I hope you recognize that.

I want to talk to you about Deuteronomy 6, verses 1 to 5. Now, the crisis I have with this, I'll tell you about when I finish, but listen to it patiently first, and then I'll tell you where I ran into trouble with it.

We're talking about the law of the land because the people of Israel are gathered on the banks of the Jordan about to cross in to possess the land which is to be their country.

That's where they're going to live. God has created a people. God has established a covenant. God has brought them through 40 years wandering in the wilderness, and God has promised them a land, and they're about to take it over.

[4 : 22] But in order to take it over, they have to know how to behave. And Moses preaches them three lengthy sermons which are contained in the book of Deuteronomy to tell them how they are to behave when they move into the land.

And Deuteronomy 6 is talking about that law of the land. Verse 1 says, these are the commands.

And apparently it is singular and perhaps could be translated, this is the commandment. In other words, God says this is what you're to do, and now you go and do it.

So God chooses the commandment. That's the beginning of my crisis. But again, I won't tell you just yet.

Then the next thing that happens in this passage is Moses says, God has directed me to teach you to observe it. That's the role of leadership.

[5 : 27] God has given a command. I am to tell you that you are to obey that command. And that leadership is given to Moses to tell him that.

The function of the teaching, if you look at it carefully, is to establish, and this is in verse 2, the fear of the Lord. Sheer terror.

I mean, the reason that policemen go around with enough artillery on them to sort of blast any tall tower out of existence is not because that's what they're to do, but they're to look like they're capable of doing it so that you will do what they tell you without a lot of questions.

And, I mean, that's the same way they dress up police cruisers in order to establish a certain amount of fear. I tend to be afraid.

My foot shifts off the accelerator a little bit, and I make sure my belt is done up properly and I part my hair and do those things.

[6 : 46] So that this is, this is, seems to be the fundamental kind of principle is that, that Moses says, you're to be given this in order that the fear of the Lord may take possession of you.

Remember, we talked a little bit last week about the trumpets and the smoke and the darkness and the earthquake and out of this came the voice of God and God said, this is what you're to do.

So, God was wanting to instill fear. I would like to say, because people are very sophisticated generation, we don't like this word fear, you know, we're all a happy bunch of people and there's nothing.

Well, I would say that it is an entirely appropriate thing to be scared to death of God and that you really take him very seriously because he intends that you should take him seriously.

And so, he establishes this fear as the basis of his teaching and that it's an altogether appropriate response.

[7 : 54] Then he says that this fear is to be communicated from generation to generation. In other words, you are to teach your children to fear God and they are to teach their children to fear God.

You are to put the fear of God into them in a, not the tyrannical way that you might at first think, but that somehow they will get the picture.

I always remember a young friend of mine when we were both sort of, we were both in university and he was talking about the fact that in his home, his parents always read the Bible and prayed at every meal.

And he said, after sort of a lifetime of this, he said, the thing that really impressed me was that my father got up and knelt down at his chair to pray.

I mean, that's way out of date, isn't it? I mean, we don't do that kind of thing anymore because we're so sophisticated. but that taught him, in a sense, to fear the God to whom his father would bow down to pray.

[9 : 10] It's an interesting thing. So that we are to teach our children and establish in them the fear of the Lord from one generation to another.

The result of this fear, the positive, good result of it, is that people will take the command seriously, the command that God gives them.

You have that fear, now you'll take the command seriously. So that we who don't like to be afraid of anything don't take anything seriously.

And God sometimes has to hit you fairly hard between the eyes before you begin to take him seriously. And many of you could probably testify to those experiences in your life.

You fearing him, then, you obey what he says to do. And obeying what he says to do leads to the enjoyment of long life.

[10 : 14] You see how that, in the end of verse 2, I give you that you may enjoy long life. So that basically, long life is one of the results of obeying the commandment.

that's just a practical result of it. You know, it's not a reward, it just means that that's what happens.

The next thing that we're told in this passage is that to hear and obey the commands of God will produce prosperity, progeny, and enjoyment.

And you see where it says, be careful to obey so that it may go well with you, that's prosperity, so that you may increase greatly, that's progeny, that you may find enjoyment because you're in a land flowing with milk and honey.

So, prosperity, progeny, and enjoyment on the basis that that's what God has promised. and God has promised what it is his purpose you should enjoy.

So, it's a very positive picture of human life. It's one of the things that we would like to be able to incorporate into our various doctrines of human rights.

[11 : 34] That everybody on the face of the globe should enjoy prosperity, progeny, and enjoyment. That that should be part of what life is all about. Now, as you know, for many, it is not.

The reason it is not, if you were to take this passage seriously, is that we are out of touch with the fear of the Lord and therefore disobedient to the command of the Lord and therefore the promises of God are not forthcoming.

I mean, that's the logic of this passage and if you want to argue, you can argue with the passage about it. Then he goes on and says that the fact of the matter is that the Lord our God, the Lord alone is God.

And what this means is that, I mean, if you were to look in the next chapter, it talks about other gods and the constant drift away from the Lord who is God, the Lord who alone is God.

The drift away from that to other gods, other deities. Whether idolatrously or whatever it is, you drift away. And of course, what they were talking about was that these people were going into a promised land.

[13 : 02] The promised land was occupied and surrounded by various kinds of gods of weather and of fields and of skies and of clouds and of sea and all these gods were all around.

But they were to pay no attention to them because the fact of the matter was, as Moses told them, the fact of the matter is that the Lord our God, the Lord alone is God.

and that's offensive again to our sophisticated society, but there it is. Then he says in the last part of this passage that the appropriate response to that fact is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Now, the point of that seems to me to be that we need leadership. We need leadership at the federal level. We need leadership at the provincial level.

We need leadership at the municipal level. We need leadership in the local congregation. But basically, you personally and individually need a leader.

[14 : 19] And these people were facing the crisis of losing the man who had led them out of slavery, led them through the wilderness, led them to the banks of the Jordan River, and now he was to die.

And they were going in there leaderless. But he says, you're not leaderless because the Lord alone, he is God.

And you are to obey him. And he is to be your leader as a land, as a people, and as an individual. He is to be your leader.

And if he isn't, it means either that you are consorting with other gods or you are in fact leaderless. You don't have anything, any direction to your life, anything to lead you.

And so that's the problem. Now, the crisis in my life came after I was here last week and I looked out on your faces.

[15 : 33] And I, this is, I mean, you're all very good looking and all that, but it's almost impossible to hide the reality of the suffering which in some way sculpts and shapes who you are.

You can't hide that, I don't think. When I went home last week, I, my thought was, what am I doing standing up and saying to these people, you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength, when I should be saying, God, can't you see the suffering that is here?

Why don't you do something? Why don't you move in on some of the situations which are right here? And how should I stand up and tell people to love you when a single mother living in poverty, a wonderful person suffering the irreversible encroachment of disease, a senior executive facing job loss and lifestyle loss, a struggling soul suffering from acute gender confusion, a prevailing sense of alienation in people's hearts, great masses of existential loneliness, I like that phrase, in a city of two million people, why so much profound loneliness in a city with such a population, handicapped people in a world that worships athletes, what do you do about that?

and, you know, old age in a world that is youth oriented, it's difficult let me tell you, however I can dream, and the poverty in a world of wealth, being ugly in a world that's fixated on beauty, sexually isolated in a world of sexual promiscuity, being a victim of the world's tyrannies of one kind and another, there is such an accumulation of human suffering which should be dealt with, that that should be where the gospel begins, shouldn't it?

That's how it should happen. God, do something about this, and the next problem that comes up from that is, and if you're not going to, I am, and thus I create another God, who looks a lot like me. [18 : 47] The, you see, the difficulty that I see in this, is, it's a strange thing, isn't it, to say, what you need to do is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

That's primary. Nothing else ultimately matters. I don't care if you're on welfare. I don't care if you're crippled with disease.

I don't care what your circumstances are. The thing that you need to do is to love God. Now, that sounded to me, and I, that sounded to me like a terrible contradiction.

which, and, now, I told you about it. I hope I can get out of it. But it's, you know, because, because it's such a, it's such a difficult thing.

It's such a hard thing to explain. And, and it seems to me, I mean, I, that, that we live in, with such prosperity, such material prosperity, we have such health and medical resources, we have such lovely homes and such a lovely country to enjoy, that if you are robbed of the enjoyment of all that, then surely the function of God is to help you enjoy all that.

[20 : 34] That's what he should be doing, making sure that everybody can enjoy prosperity, progeny, and whatever else there is to enjoy. That's what God's business is.

Why doesn't he give down to us? Well, you see, what, what I think happens is this, that, uh, we are, uh, we're constantly compromising, and, uh, we are trying to find immediate and available answers to immediate problems.

And the ultimate meaning of our life is lost sight of. And we become resentful because God has not seen fit to pour on us beauty and wealth and prosperity and every good thing that it would be imaginable that we could have.

Why hasn't he? That's what he promises, doesn't he? But he says, prior to that is the necessity of loving the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul and all your strength. That's it. And that is independent of the circumstances of your life. And the concept that when God gives me prosperity and when God gives me progeny and when God gives me enjoyment and when God gives me every possible benefit that this world can afford, then out of thankfulness I will turn to him and say I love you Lord.

[22 : 24] But what we're getting at here and what I think is important is that the primary reality of our life is to be our relationship to God.

And then the poor of us is wealthy beyond imagination and the sickest among us is closer to the kingdom than all the healthy people in the world.

And suffering becomes the doorway to the reality of the grace and mercy of a God who has commanded you to love him, no matter what your circumstances are.

And that's why, you know, that's what needs to happen. God, and I think that establishing this relationship is what's needed.

Obedying the command to love him with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength, that's what's needed. We haven't got a God who is committed to making life pain-free.

[23 : 41] And if God, you know, if we think that's what God's there for, it seems that we are mistaken about God. All we have is a God who says, I want you to trust me and I want you to obey me, and that has nothing to do with the circumstances of your life.

That's primary to everything else in your life, to trust him and to obey him. And, you know, the reason I say that it was a crisis for me is because I, you know, I do what I'm doing right now. I've done lots of times in my life, tried to persuade people about God. And then after I've done it, I'm just hit by a way of the reality of human suffering in the lives of people I'm talking to.

And I just, you know, and I feel weighed down by that. And I feel tempted to say, well, okay, let's forget about God until we solve this problem.

problem. And I think that what we need to understand is that you don't forget about God until you solve the problem. The first responsibility you have is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength.

[25 : 18] And if he, as one person described to me yesterday, takes a megaphone to shout in your ear to get your attention, that what he's after is that you will learn to love him and that you will put that absolutely first.

And he doesn't, and I would say that God doesn't care about the circumstances of your life. Now, you know I don't mean that, because he profoundly cares about it.

But what he mostly cares about is that you will trust him first and foremost with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength. And I guess I feel that I have compromised with, in my thinking, so much with saying, well, I will, you know, I can't expect you to trust God now, but after you have found some answers to your immediate problems, then you might like to think about some of the theological issues that are involved.

But the truth of the matter is it's the reverse way. That's what it says here. We have only a God who commands us to obey, and the command we are asked to obey is to love him.

This final picture, and I'm through. The life of Jesus Christ needs to be understood as a life of perfect obedience.

[26 : 58] And that perfect obedience is fulfilled in that frail human frame of which you and I are examples.

In the flesh, he obeyed God. He says, the body have you prepared me? I come to do your will. And even at the cross, he said, thy will be done. And, you know, that not my will, but thy will be done.

And that what Christ did in facing the cross was to say, I trust God. I obey him. I love him, in a sense, speaking as one of us.

I love him with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my strength. My business is to obey him. And trust him in whatever circumstance he may bring us in.

[28 : 06] And that's our job, too. It's exactly what we're to do. We're not to compromise with us.

But we're not to try to compromise with him. Let's pray. Our God, we, and I guess I am so utterly self-centered that I want you somehow to approach me in a conciliatory way, and to win my favor, and to win my allegiance.

But you approach me in a sense with, well, I'm filled with fear at your power and your authority, and at the circumstances which might be visited upon me.

And you command that I should love you with all my heart. I want to get somebody else to take responsibility for leadership. I want somebody else to tell me how to live my life.

And you've asked us to trust you in whatever circumstances we have to live our lives and to learn to trust and obey you and your commands.

[29 : 31] And that ultimately our prosperity and our progeny and our enjoyment are in the delight that you are God and that you have commanded us to love you and you've made it possible for us to adore you.

and you've demonstrated this to us in Jesus Christ in his name we pray. Amen.