Deuteronomy 4:32-40 AM

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Date: 12 January 2025

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[0:00] Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer.

Amen. May you be seated. So, first week of Epiphany, but second week of sermon series.
We are second week of a nine-week series on the story of God. I think there should be a little slide. Oh, waiting for it.
The anticipation is building. The slide is coming. Oh, that was worth the wait. That was well worth the wait. So, I can't take credit for anything here. Jacob Vandiver, one of our curates, designed to this sermon series.
Ryan Spear, another one of our curates, designed this slide. So, kudos to the curates. But it shows you that our sermon series is nine weeks long, and it's got three basic movements.
[1:09] It's going to take us from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 in three parts. The God who speaks. The God who dwells. And then the God who reigns.

And we are in the second week of the first section on the God who speaks. Last week, David took us through Genesis chapter 1, the God who creates.
And this week, we parachute into Deuteronomy chapter 4, the God who reveals. Now, there are a few things that have happened between Genesis 1 and Deuteronomy chapter 4.
I don't have enough time in the whole day to unpack them all. So, I figure let's just jump in and see what happens. So, we've got two main points this morning. First, we're going to listen to the God who speaks.
And second, the God who speaks so that we might know his supremacy. So that we might know he is supreme. This word is spoken originally to a people.
[2:14] The people of God, Israel, who stand on the precipice of the promised land. So, one of the great promises in the Old Testament that God made to Abraham hundreds of years before this moment in his nation's history is he said, I am going to bless you, Abraham.

I'm going to give you land. I'm going to make a great family, a great nation out of you. And then all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed through you. And so, one of the things that we see throughout the Old Testament is that God is there's this journeying towards the gift of land that God's going to give his people.
So, even when he delivers them out of slavery in Egypt, he brings them into the wilderness and then they sin a bit. So, he has to teach them a few lessons in the wilderness. It takes them a bit of time.
But ultimately, he's bringing them to a land. And the land isn't just about blessing Israel, although that's true in fulfilling his promises. It is about displaying to all the other nations that surround Israel that their God is the one true Lord.
And so, Israel right now, in the beginning chapters of the book of Deuteronomy, are standing on the precipice of the promised land. They're not there yet, but God has told them, I'm going to fulfill my promises.
[3:24] I'm taking you there. So, it is a moment where they are about to embark on a new season of their life together. It's full of potential and possibility and prosperity and promise.

And yet, God wants to warn his people, and you'll see this if you read the whole of chapter 4, that the land they're going into is going to have lots of different types of people. It's going to have many cultures and many languages and many foods and many lifestyles and many beliefs and many gods.

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It's a pluralistic land. It's energetic with diversity. And God knows implicitly that there's a temptation that his people are going to experience as they go into this land that is his good gift to them. They're going to be tempted by the lifestyles and challenged by the beliefs of the other people that are around them. Like when they're rubbing shoulders on people in the classrooms or making decisions in the hospitals or talking with a neighbor.
They're going to be tempted to grow numb to the uniqueness of their God. Maybe consider all the other gods as similar to the one that has saved them. They're going to be tempted to grow forgetful of the amazing grace and the amazing things that God has done in their midst and spoken to them. [4:33] And they're going to be tempted to grow tired, ultimately, of living the life that God has called them to. And so God sets out in Deuteronomy chapter 4, before his people enter into the land that he's going to give them, to fulfill his promises to Abraham and to show all the nations around that he is the one true Lord.

God speaks a word to his people to strengthen his people, to encourage them for what's about to happen, to make them ready for the days ahead. And how does God do this? He just speaks.
You see this in verses 32 and 33. If you're not there, you might want to venture back to page 149 in your Bibles. 149. Verses 32 and 33.
The focus of our passage emerges right at the beginning. It's not just the mighty works of God. It's the mighty words of God. Verse 32.
For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you since the day that God created man on earth. And asked from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever, and here it is, heard of.
[5:45] So it's not just that it happened. It's that God is explaining its significance. Verse 33. Did any people ever hear the voice of a God speaking out of the midst of a fire as you have heard and still live?

You see, one of the most basic convictions of the Bible, which I think is emerging here, coming to the surface, is one of the most revolutionary. And it's simply this.
That God speaks. He reveals himself. He's not mute or silent, but he's eloquent. He's not the great uncaring God of deism who, like a watchmaker, creates the watch, sets it ticking away, and then leaves it to do its own thing, but doesn't want any personal relationship with it.
No, he speaks to what he has created to draw them into a deep, dialogical communion of love. And he's not like the great unknown kind of God, like, have you guys heard of the, you guys remember the little parable about the elephant?
And people are holding on to different parts of the elephant. It's meant to kind of explain, a way of explaining how different religions can drastically, believe drastically different things about God, but essentially be grasping after the same reality.
[7:04] And the image is of an elephant and six different people that are blind in the room, and they're holding on to different parts of the elephant. So one is holding on to the trunk, and they're like, oh, maybe this is a tree.

Another's holding on to the tail, and it's like, oh, maybe this is a rope. And another is holding on to the side of the elephant, and they're like, oh, maybe this is a wall. And this is a common image that can be used.
I mean, I've even come across this in university classrooms. And the conviction is that all religions are essentially the same. No one can see the whole elephant, and no one has the full picture.
So whether it's Christianity or Judaism or Islam or Buddhism or Hinduism, it's all the same. One religion cannot conclusively say what God is like or what life is about. Now, there's a lot of things we could analyze here.
There's a whole lot to unpack here. But there are two assumptions that people don't often talk about here. The first assumption is the analogy assumes that the elephant doesn't talk. And the second is the analogy assumes that humans have to take the initiative in knowing and naming God.
[8:17] And those are two things in Deuteronomy chapter 4 that we are told that are assumptions that are wrong and not worthy of God. He takes the initiative to make himself known.

And he does so through speech. Twice we are told that God speaks out of the midst of the fire. That was in verse 33.
This is a reference to God speaking to Israel at Mount Sinai. After their redemption in Egypt, he brings them to the mountain. And his glory descends on the mountain.

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And people can't even go up the mountain unless they would die. And God speaks out of the fire to reveal himself to the people. And so the image that is being used here of revelation is not just like a computer image that we would think of where you download information about God into your mind. Although it's important to know true things about God. But it's a coming face to face with the living God who has come to dwell with his people. It is a fiery experience in the holiness of God Almighty. [9:24] It is an encounter that cannot possibly be something that you can compare to anything else in your life. It is a transforming encounter with the living God who created us and who is saving us and who is revealing himself to us.

And one of the astonishing parts of verse 33, we're told, is that we can hear God speak and we can survive it. Did you notice that? It says something really important about the purpose of God's speech.
It's so powerful it could destroy us, yet it's so loving that it does not overwhelm us. Because the purpose of God's speech ultimately, and this is the whole theme of the book of Deuteronomy, is to capture our hearts again.
He speaks to us because he loves us and he wants us to love him in return. And he's jealous for our love as a good spouse would be jealous for the love of their beloved.
They don't want them to get distracted by anything else other than the one object that is worth loving, and that's God himself. So our first point is, how do we know God?
[10:36] Really simply, God speaks. He makes himself known. And the second point is, what do we know about God, or why does he speak this? God speaks so that we would know his supremacy.

Just sit here with me for a moment. It's probably not the word you expected. His word is like fire from heaven to restore the supremacy of God in our hearts.
Now, where do I get this? Two places in Deuteronomy chapter 4. Our passage has two main sections that each end by making essentially the same point.
So the first section is verses 32 to 35. 32 is quite astonishing, actually. The author asks us, or God asks us, to consider the whole space-time continuum.
He goes, has anything ever happened since the creation of the world that is remotely like this? And then says, has anything ever happened from one end of heaven to the other that is anything like this?
[11:43] So, God's asking us to consider the whole space-time continuum. And he asks us to consider whether any other God has said or done anything remotely like him.

And then it leads us to this conclusion in verse 35. To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord is God. There is no other beside him.
He is incomparable in his majesty. And unrivaled in his mercy. The next section, verses 36 to 39, asks us to consider the meaning of all God's mighty works for us today.
So if you look at verse 37. He goes down a litany of the things God has done. God loved our brothers and sisters that came before us. He chose us to be his people.
He delivered us out of Egypt. He made himself known to us and was present in great power in our midst. He's bringing us to the promised land. Just listen to all the things God has done.
[12:50] And yet the point of the passage is, what does everything that God has done in the past have to do with me in the present moment? What is the meaning of all his mighty works for me here today?

And we get it right away in verse 35. Know therefore today and lay it to your heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath.
And there is no other. It's as God said to Isaiah many years later, to whom will you compare me?
So we see developing in this passage that the purpose of God's revelation is that we might know his unrivaled uniqueness. And the goal of his speaking to us is to restore the dominion and glory of God in the hearts and minds of his people.
And the personal question that I found myself asking this week is, isn't this what we most often and most deeply need in life?
[13:55] I mean, think about this just for a second with me. In your life right now, what is the greatest thing that you feel you need from the Lord? Yeah, let me get a little more personal.

Every one of you came in here today with something on your heart and mind probably. Why did you come here? What did you want to receive from God this morning?

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See, I know there are people in our church that have children in the hospital and they're terrified. There are people in our church who have children who have walked away from the Lord and their hearts are broken.
People in our church who are desperately alone and feel like no one sees and no one cares. People in our church who are retiring and don't know who they are apart from their work.
People in our church who have major decisions to make that could shape the trajectory of their lives for decades to come. And they are feeling paralyzed inside about it. People in our church that have committed that same sin yet again.
[15:09] They said they would never do it. And now they feel defeated and hopeless and enslaved and ashamed and not worthy to be here. See, what did you come in this morning wanting to hear from the Lord, wanting to receive from him?

What did you hope that the Lord would do in your life? And Deuteronomy chapter 4 says to us, I believe, that the deepest thing we need from the Lord in any situation or season of life is to know that he is God.
It's the thing that Moses most needed. Remember? God said, I would like you, Moses, to go to Pharaoh and tell him that you're going to lead my people out of slavery.
Moses was heavy with the weight of a ministry that was beyond his capacity. He needed God to speak to him. And so God says, I'm going to be with you. I am who I am. Reveals himself.
It's the thing that Job most needed. I mean, think about the 30-something chapters in the book of Job that go through the crushing weight of his suffering. Suffering beyond his wildest dreams or imagining and the grief and anger and justice of it all.
[16:23] And yet in the end, Job gets none of his questions about the reasons for suffering answered. What does he get? God comes to him in a storm and speaks to him and says, where were you, Job, when I laid the foundation of the earth?

In other words, I am way beyond your understanding of what's going on in this situation. And yet I am fully present to you as your Lord. It's the thing that Israel most needed.
When Israel looked at the other nations around them in the world and they felt like the world was crumbling around them, wars were raging, fires going, kingdoms toppling.
And they needed God to speak to them. And we see in Psalm 46, God just says to them in the midst of the chaos that they see around them, be still, my people. And know that I am God.
And I think it's the thing that the early church most needed. If you read the book of Hebrews, it's written to a people that feel shaky in their faith. They've been Christians in a, for them, staying Christians in a culture where it felt like they had to swim upstream like salmon.
[17:35] And they started to feel quite beat up after a while. And they were starting to doubt and have second thoughts about whether this following Jesus was really worth it. And where does the author of Hebrews begin?

Does it, does it begin with apologetics or exhortation or get more involved? No. They need to hear God speak. So he quotes every, every Old Testament passage he can think of to point them to the supremacy of Christ.
My favorite one is Hebrews chapter one, verse 10. He says, you, oh Lord. And he's speaking about Christ here. You laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will praise you. They will perish, but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment, like a robe. You will roll them up like a garment.
They will be changed. But you, Christ, are the same. And your years will have no end. See, I don't know what you're going through this morning, brothers and sisters.
[18:41] But I think what God is trying to say to us is that we need a whole bunch of things from him. We need our daily bread and we need his mercies new every morning. But above all and in all, every detail of our lives, we need to know that the Lord is God.

Beside him, there is no other. He is sovereign over our lives. He is attentive to our cries. And he is speaking to us so that our hearts and minds would be filled with his glory and his splendor and his supremacy once again.
Now, the main focus of our passage is on the God who reveals himself. But don't forget verse 40 right at the end there. The very final verse assumes that divine revelation calls for some sort of human response.

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So the question is, how do we respond to the God who reveals himself through speech? And the key word here is keep. Verse 40. Therefore, you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today.
And the practical question I have is how? What does it look like to keep? And I want to make three brief suggestions in conclusion that I think emerge out of this passage.
[20:13] And the first is this. Listen to what God has spoken where God has spoken it. Twice our passage gets very specific.

God spoke out of the fire. God speaking is not a vague pie in the sky. He speaks to particular people in particular places.
And the book of Hebrews gets even more specific. The book of Hebrews says, Long ago and many times and many places, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son.
By his son. So God speaks to us through Holy Scripture. But what he is doing in Holy Scripture is he is bringing us to his son. Who is the speech and revelation of God to the world.
And one of the things that becomes very clear to us very quickly in the Christian life is we, if we try to do what God says without being constantly in touch with God's living speech, with his living word.
[21:18] Then the fire in the fireplace is going to go out and grow cold very quickly. You get what I'm saying here? God's speech is not just a, here's content download.

Now go do the content that I gave you. God's speech draws us into a living and dynamic encounter and relationship with him. And it's out of that dynamic encounter and relationship with him that we are empowered by him to do anything he's called us to do.
So if we take his commands and we just try to run and do them without being constantly in touch with God's word and his speaking and being fueled by him over and over again, then we're going to run dry and cold and discouraged.
And so the encouragement is listen to what God has spoken where God has spoken at first. And the second thing is treasure what you hear from God in your heart.
So I don't, by that, I don't mean listen to your heart. And by that, I mean, listen to what God's speaking to you and what's speaking in Holy scripture about his son and treasure it in your heart.
[22:27] We see this in verse 39. It says, let this sink into your heart today that the Lord is God.
And I think it's helpful for us to remember Paul's exhortation in Colossians 3.

He says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. So the goal of reading the Bible, the goal of hearing God speak is not just so that we know all the answers, although we want to know true things about God, but it's so that the word of God dwells in us.
It's so that we're being inhabited by Christ through his word and transformed by the one that we are treasuring. Think of Mary, for example.
She heard Jesus speak to him in Luke chapter 2. I love this passage, actually. It's really comforting. She hears Jesus speak to her, and Luke tells us that she didn't understand what Jesus was saying. Isn't that kind of lovely? And yet, it's a fascinating thing. What does Luke go on to say? He said, yet she treasured, she stored these things up in her heart.
[23:42] So there was this sense in Mary that even if she didn't at first fully understand what in the world Jesus was on about, it was still worth storing up what he had said in her heart and trusting that in time, God would use that to do a work in her and show her what he needed to know about herself.

And it was David himself who said, your word I have hidden in my heart that I may not sin against you. And that leads us to the third thing, not just listen to what God is speaking, where God's speaking it, not just treasure these things in your heart, but third, follow what you hear in your life.
Verse 40 tells us that the appropriate response to God's revelation is to keep his commands. We are called to be doers of the word, not just hearers.
And obedience, let me be clear, is not a way of earning God's love, it's a way of trusting God's love.
And this is really significant for us, because I think the greatest difficulty when we read scripture, when we're seeking to listen to God's speech to us, the greatest difficulty is not just intellectual, like how do we understand these things, although there's lots of things that are really hard to understand in the Bible.
But the greatest difficulty is spiritual. It's that we resist the grace that God is seeking to offer us. We might very well know what the scripture says, but we wish it said something else.

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[25:11] We might very well know what the scripture says, but we don't want to do what it says, and we want to do what it says not to do. And so we find God's commands hard to keep.

And we have to admit that this is true for each one of us in some area of our life and in some way. And so there's an invitation for us here to constantly be turning to the Lord. That's what repentance means.

It just means turning back to the Lord, asking the Lord to give us the ears to hear what he is really saying, and not just what we would like him to say. And also by his Holy Spirit to incline our hearts to love what he says and commands.

Because one of the things that we come to realize in the Christian life is that ultimately our response to revelation is dependent on the power of the revealer in our lives.

Our response to revelation is dependent on the power of the revealer in our lives. So my brothers and sisters, listen, treasure, follow. Why?

[26:16] Well, because the Lord Jesus is God in heaven above and on earth beneath, and there is no other. And as we listen to him and treasure him and follow him, we will know fullness of joy.

And one day we will know life everlasting. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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