

Deuteronomy 4:32-40 PM

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[0 : 01] Heavenly Father, we ask that you'd open our hearts to hear your word and respond in loving faith and obedience. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated.

So welcome. My name's Will Gray. If we've not met or if you have questions about anything I say in the next few minutes, I'd love to get a soup and chat after the service.

And last week we started a sermon series called The Story of God. And in this series we are looking at the big story of Scripture to see what God does for his people throughout Scripture and what this teaches us about him.

Last week we began with creation, the God who creates. And in Genesis 1 and 2 we saw the good God speaking to make a good world.

And tonight we are looking at Deuteronomy 4 and the God who reveals. So God speaks to create and God speaks to make himself known to his people.

[1 : 05] Now if you're not familiar with the big story of the Bible, a lot of important stuff happens between Genesis 1 and Deuteronomy 4. Here's my 30-second summary.

Okay, buckle up. In response to our rejection of God and his good rule, God chose a man named Abraham. And he made a covenant with him and with his family.

So God made promises to Abraham's family. He promised to give them many descendants, to bring them into a good land. And he promised that Abraham's family would be a blessing to the whole world.

He said they would be a light to the nations. Now, somewhere along the way, Abraham's family ended up enslaved in Egypt. This is the people of Israel. And afterward, God rescues them. He rescues them miraculously. And then he speaks to them and leads them through the wilderness for 40 years. And that's where we are in the story when we get to Deuteronomy.

[2 : 04] The book of Deuteronomy records Moses' final instructions to Israel before they enter the promised land. So they're right on the verge of the promised land.

And Moses is reminding them of everything that God's done and the importance of them listening and obeying his word. So I think we're ready now to dive into our passage. Deuteronomy 4, 32 to 40.

You can follow along on page 149. And I don't want to keep you in suspense. So here's the big idea. In his works and in his words, the Lord reveals himself to be the only true God.

And he calls us to a life of loving worship and obedience. So in his works and in his words, the Lord reveals himself to be the only true God. And calls us to a life of loving worship and obedience.

So in Deuteronomy 4, Moses has been preaching about idolatry. Now, idolatry is a big Bible word for false worship. For worshipping anything other than the one true God.

[3 : 10] In Moses' time, people worshipped statues, images, and powers that were associated with things in creation like the sun or fertility. And I'm guessing most of you haven't bowed down to a statue or offered sacrifices to pagan gods like Baal or Moloch or Asherah this week.

Maybe you have. I don't know. I don't know, actually. But I am 100% certain that each of us have given our ultimate love, affection, and trust to created things rather than our creator.

Things like money, sex, power and popularity, comfort, self-determination, expressive individualism. These are the common idols of our time and place.

And as Moses preaches against this kind of false worship, he reminds Israel how the one true God has revealed himself to them. In his works and in his words.

In what he's done and in what he's said. And then he tells them to respond, again, in loving worship and obedience. So those are our three points. God reveals himself in his works.

[4 : 24] God reveals himself in his words. And we respond with worship and loving obedience. So first, God reveals himself in his works.

Look at verse 32. Moses is absolutely astounded. His mind is blown by the uniqueness of what God has done for his people.

He says, For ask now of 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 the heaven to the other, whether such a great thing has ever happened or was ever heard of.

Did any people ever hear the voice of a God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard and still live? Or has any God attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation?

Basically, Moses is saying to the people of Israel, look. Look at what God has done for you. He spoke to you out of the fire and smoke and cloud and you lived.

[5 : 30] He took you for himself out of another nation. He saved you from slavery in Egypt by trials, signs, wonders, wars, and mighty deeds.

He's saying nothing like this has ever happened before. I mean, the pagan gods, the gods of the nations around Israel, didn't do these sorts of things for their people.

These gods were unpredictable, cruel, depraved, violent, and needy. The gods of Israel's neighbors didn't save people to be their treasured family.

They used people to provide for their many needs and desires. And so God's saving actions for his people were always meant to highlight this.

Look at verse 35. To you, these things were shown that you might know that the Lord is God and there is no other besides him.

[6 : 34] I'm certain Moses remembered this from the Exodus. The events of the Exodus were kind of like a cosmic contest for Israel and the world.

You see, Egypt was the great world power at the time. And Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was worshipped as a god among the many gods that Egypt worshipped. And if you go back to the book of Exodus, you'll see over and over again, as God is bringing these plagues and signs and wonders against the Egyptians, he says over and over that he's doing it to show Israel and Egypt and the whole world that the Lord, Yahweh, is God and there is no other.

And Moses had a front row seat for this cosmic drama. And so now as his people are about to go into the promised land, he reminds them. He says, remember, God showed you incredible things in Egypt.

And he did this so that you would know that he is the Lord, God, and there is no other. So that's the first point. God reveals himself in his works, in what he does.

And now the second point is God reveals himself in his words. So look at verse 36. Out of heaven he, that's God, let you hear his voice that he might discipline you.

[8 : 02] This little phrase, this little phrase reveals a couple really amazing things, really essential things about God and Christianity.

The first is that God's actually let us hear his voice. And the second is that when God speaks to us, he speaks as a father, speaks to his children.

I don't know if you noticed, but in verse 36 on, there's a bit of a shift in tone. God's revelation becomes very personal. So the perspective shifts from a cosmic battle to God's fatherly love and care for his people.

Again, he lets us hear his voice so that he might discipline us as children. Discipline is a word that sounds harsh to our contemporary ears, but here it communicates something really lovely.

It shows that God relates to his people as a father relates to his children. And he's not a distant or apathetic father. Look at verse 37 and on.

[9 : 12] God is a loving father who has chosen children for himself and who is absolutely committed to seeing those children grow and flourish. So why does God speak?

God speaks to make himself known, and he speaks to train and lead his people in the way of life.

And once again, the Lord's words and his actions are meant to reveal something, namely that he is God and that there is no other.

And friends, this is all grace. It's all a gift to us. God did not need to choose or save or redeem a people for himself. God does not need to let us hear his fatherly voice, but he does.

And this makes Christianity and the Christian story of God utterly unique. For all the talk in past decades about the death of God in the West and the triumph of scientific materialism and these sorts of things, I think there's actually a growing interest in spirituality in our culture and in the Western world.

But much of this spirituality is very vague and abstract. It's not the personal, sovereign, loving God who speaks to us in Scripture.

[10:36] So, for example, one way people conceive of God in our time is as a higher power. This is sometimes called deism.

So in this story, God is essentially uninvolved in the world and in our day-to-day lives. You might have heard something like this. God is this higher power who created the universe, established all the laws of nature, and then let everything go on its merry way.

You know, sometimes this idea of God is called the watchmaker because it's like God is a watchmaker who created the universe, wound it up, and is now just letting it tick away on its own. This kind of God, this higher power, would never speak to us, certainly not as a father, and he would never reach down out of heaven to save a people for himself.

Another idea of God that's popular nowadays is universalism. In universalism, God is essentially unknowable.

[11:44] The idea is that all religions and spiritualities grasp something of God and are like roads that converge on this single, ultimate, unknowable reality.

And when I was in college, someone told me an analogy. It was supposed to be a critique of religions like Christianity that made these kind of universal claims.

And it went something like this. Imagine three blind men entered a room where there was an elephant. One blind man touched the elephant's trunk and said, oh my goodness, there's a humongous snake in this room with us.

And another man grabbed one of the elephant's legs and said, we're in a forest with mighty trees.

And the third man grabbed the elephant's ear and said, we're in the midst of some huge tent where there's this large sheep.

And the idea in this, of course, is that all the religions of the world are like the blind men who are grasping around. Each religion grasps a part of God and mistakenly thinks it's the whole.

[12:55] From a biblical perspective, there's one big problem with this analogy. I wonder if you can guess what it is based on our passage tonight. What if the elephant spoke and said to the blind man, you're wrong.

I'm not a snake. I'm not a tree. I'm not a tent. I'm an elephant. The thing you're touching now is an elephant. And then proceeded to tell them what he was like.

This is what God has done for us. God isn't silent. He's spoken. And this is both the gift and the challenge of Christianity. God has not left us in the dark to guess about who he is or what he's like. God has spoken because he wants to know us and be known by us. And what a gift. What a gift that the God who made the universe wants to be known by us as a father.

And he's spoken to make that happen. But this also means that we're without excuse. If God had not spoken, we would kind of be like those blind men in that story.

[14:13] The best we could do is fumble after God in the dark with whatever small, finite gifts of wisdom and insight and reason that he'd give us. And we'd have no hope of getting it right.

At least not in the full sense of who God is. But this isn't the case. God has spoken. In his works and in his word, God has told us who he is and what he is like.

He has revealed that he is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. And there is no other. And in the New Testament, God reveals himself in an even more profound way than he did to the people of Israel.

God's word, his very nature, becomes a human being in Jesus Christ. This is what we just remembered at Christmastime. The invisible God takes on human flesh so that we can see his glory.

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way. Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

[15:27] But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son. So God, the creator, does not just speak to you personally.

He speaks to you as a person. The Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus' divinity wasn't an invention of the early church.

Jesus claimed all the authority and all the exclusivity of God for himself. He said things like, to see him was to see the father.

Or that no one could come to the father except through him. Or he said that all who love God would hear him and obey his voice. And so we see in God's words that God is not the cosmic watchmaker who cranked up the universe and lets it tick along at a safe distance.

He is not the single mysterious reality to which all religions converge. He is the God who has spoken to his people and who now speaks to us in and through his son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

[16:42] So finally, and briefly, what is our response to all of this? Well, in verse 39, Moses repeats what he said in verse 35, but with an addition.

He says, know today and lay it to your heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. There is no other. So Moses tells them, know that the Lord is God, but also lay this to your hearts.

And this is really significant because it's possible to know something passively. We can receive information, we can receive knowledge and do nothing with it.

We all probably know all sorts of things that have no real bearing on our day-to-day lives. But this isn't the kind of knowing that God has in mind when he reveals himself to us.

In verse 37, Moses reminds the people of God's grace to them. He lists all the things that God did for them, choosing them, saving them, giving them the land. And then he says, lay it to your heart that the Lord is God.

[17:59] There is no other. And in Bible times, they thought of the heart a bit differently than we do. When we think about the heart, or sometimes when I think about hearts, we often think about sentimental, warm, emotive feelings.

Think Valentine's Day and Hallmark Christmas movies. But in the Bible, the heart is something more like the throne of the soul.

It was the center of a person's deepest affections, their allegiance, and their will. So Moses is saying here, take the truth that there is one God, and make it the principle that animates everything in your life.

Does that make sense? Another way to say that is, know that there is one God, and then build your life on that truth. Know that there is one God, and treasure it in your heart.

Build your life on that truth. And Moses works out the implications of this, finally, in verse 40. He says, Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and your children after you.

[19:20] And so the fruit that grows in our life when we treasure God in this way, is loving obedience.

It's listening to God's word and following it. I think Aaron said last week that the fact that we have a creator means that we're not the master of our own destiny.

There's a sense in which obedience is the duty that every person owes God as our creator. And that's true, but it's not the whole truth.

Christian obedience is so much more than a duty. It's a joy. It's actually good for us. Because God wants things to go well for you.

Again, look at verse 40. God wants things to go well for his people and their children. He has spoken to make himself known to us and to lead us in the way of life and blessing.

[20:22] And so God's word to us is not a burden. It's more like a lamp in a dark place, leading us to green pastures and still waters.

And so we all cling to different idols and false gods. We all struggle with different things.

But what God is saying to us tonight is that he is God, that he is the one true God, and that he wants things to go well for you, for us. And so the best thing that we can do as we go from this place tonight is to listen to God's word and to bring every part of our lives into conformity, into obedience with what he said to us in his word.

Remember, Jesus said that he came to give us abundant life. And our inheritance in Jesus Christ is something far better than the land that Israel was about to go into in Deuteronomy.

It's an eternal kingdom of life and light and joy and feasting. And the kingdom of God is open to all who hear the voice of the king, who lay it to their hearts that he is God, and who humbly follow him,

knowing that he alone has the words of eternal life.
[21 : 47] Amen.