

## Keeping God First

Deuteronomy 4:19-39

March 29, 2009

### Intro

The name of this book in Hebrew means simply, 'words.' This is taken from the Jewish tradition of naming a book after the first words of the opening verse. The name Deuteronomy means "the second law" and literally refers to the fact that Moses was reminding them of the covenant that God gave to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. In other words, it means, "the law again."

This book contains literally the last words of Moses. These are the words which God gave to him to speak to the nation. They are words of warning, of admonition, and of encouragement.

The nation of Israel had not yet crossed over the Jordan River; they are on the east side of that river in the plains of Moab. These words were to become very important for the nation of Israel because most of the people standing there had not yet even been born when Moses stood on Mount Sinai to receive the Law of God.

Notice in chapter four verses 1-2; if Israel would listen to the statutes and the judgments of the Lord, it would go well for them. They were admonished not to add to the word, nor take anything away from the word which they were receiving.

Here in these verses, Moses is instructing them in how important it is to keep God first in their lives. He is also warning them what would happen in their lives if they did not keep God first, but he is also showing them the way back home if they ever do drift away from God.

### **I. Don't Let the Fire Cool**

- 1 Last week I quoted the famous preacher Spurgeon who said, "I am on fire for God, and when I preach, they come to watch me burn."
- 2 My prayer is that we as a church would be on fire for God, and that people would come to watch the fire that burns in our hearts.
- 3 So these words are very appropriate for us to understand. This is an admonition to not let the fire, which burns within our soul, become cool.

#### A. Be careful not to drift

- 4 Moses was warning the people of Israel not to lift up their eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars and be drawn away and worship them and serve them.
- 1 This should remind us of the first commandment that God gave to Israel, "Have

no other gods before me.” In other words, God knew that they must keep God first in their hearts or soon they would drift away into dangerous things.

- 2 Why is it so important not to have other things in our lives more important than God?
- 3 Because God knows that we become like the things which we idolize, and what that basically means is that we become dumb and stupid.

**Illus – The nation became like the Beetles they idolized.**

**Psalm 115:1-9 Those who make them become like them**

**Illus – Paul wrote of a man named Demas...**

**2 Timothy 4:9-10, Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me**

- 4 You see the problem right away, Demas loved this present world.
- 5 The writer of the book of Hebrews gives us a similar admonition.

**Hebrews 2:1, For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.**

**Illus- the problem with drifting is that you don't feel the pull of the current.**

**Jordi and I went hot air ballooning once and we found it was an amazing sensation. You feel no wind! It's calm; there is no turbulence, that is, until we tried to land!**

**Illus- when you just drift along you are not aware how far you've gone until you see a fixed point of reference. You have no idea where you are when you drift in the ocean because there are no fixed points of reference.**

- 6 God gave us his Word so that we would have a fixed point of reference, and oh, how far we've gone.

**Illus- Welcome to the nineties...**

**Ephesians 4:14, As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;**

## B. Idols are of no help in times of trouble

- 7 God made us to worship and if we do not worship Him with all our heart, we can become bored and seek other things to dedicate our time and affections to.
- 8 Verses 23-28; God is telling Israel in advance that if they allow their hearts to go after other things and have idols in their lives, that it will not go well for them.
- 9 This is because of what he mentions in verse 28, the idols cannot see, they cannot hear, therefore they cannot help.

**Illus – When Israel rejected Jesus, it was only forty short years later that their nation was left to them desolate.**

**Matthew 23:37-38, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!”**

- 10 The problem was the hand of the Lord was no longer protecting them and the hardness of their own heart led them directly into trouble.

**Psalm 27:1, The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?**

- 11 But what would happen if God were not my light and my salvation? Would there not be much to fear? What would happen if the Lord is not the defense of our lives?

## **II. Remember the Way Home**

- 1 These next verses are amazing. After giving clear warning to the people of Israel what would happen to them if they backslide in their relationship to God, he then tells them the way home.
- 2 He knew the tendency of man to wander, so he gives them the words in advance so that they know he will welcome them home.

### A. From that place seek the Lord

- 1 Verse 29 is powerful in its insight. It says, “But from there you will seek the Lord your God.”
- 2 It’s important to notice that God didn’t say to them that they had to get back to Jerusalem first, and then from there they could seek God.

- 3 No, God told them that if their hearts did wander away and they were scattered among the nations, and left few in number among the nations, that they should seek God from that place.

**App - There is great application for us in these verses because there are many people today who have found themselves drifting away from the Lord.**

It is very common for people in that condition to feel that they have to get their act together before they can seek the Lord. But that is not what we see in God's heart at all.

**Illus – Sometimes people come to a sudden awareness of how far they have drifted from the Lord. They look around them and all they see are the weeds that have grown up from the seeds of unfaithfulness and unrighteousness they have planted in their lives and they wonder what to do.**

**But the scripture tells us exactly what to do. Seek the Lord from the midst of the weeds.**

**Isaiah 55:7, Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.**

B. Seek Him with all your heart

- 4 The next statement in these verses is also very powerful. It says that when we seek the Lord from that place, even the field of weeds, that we should seek Him with all our heart and with all our soul.
- 5 In other words, God wants us to have a genuine, sincere hearts in seeking Him.

**Isaiah 29:13-14, Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote, therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; And the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed.”**

- 6 This is because God loves them with all of his heart. The scripture says that He loves us with an everlasting love.
- 7 In fact, love is mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy more than twice as many times as the first four books of the bible combined.
- 8 No doubt you have heard the scripture, “Speak the truth in love.” Many people think that verse means to speak the truth diplomatically, but God actually speaks

the truth because he truly loves us.

**Illus – If you were to do a study on the church at Ephesus you would see that it was at one time a church that deeply loved God.**

**But they had drifted away, they had backslidden and so Jesus pointed this out to them...**

**Revelation 2:4-5, “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent.”**

C. He is a compassionate God

- 9 Verse 31 is very encouraging. If we drift away, if we backslide, God tells us the way home.
- 10 Seek the Lord from that place, but seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.
- 11 And then we see why this is so, because he is a compassionate God. He will not forsake you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which he swore to them.
- 12 In other words, he deals with us on the basis of the New Covenant. He sees us through the gospel of Jesus Christ rather than according to our sins.

**App- Many people should be very encouraged by this, because many people think God doesn't want them back, that if they should appear at the door, God would turn them out.**

**But God is a compassionate God.**

**Illus – The Prodigal Son is one of the most powerful illustrations of God's heart in the scriptures. This is the story of a young man who turned his heart away from his father and turned completely to the world.**

**But he repented, he turned, and his father was compassionate.**

**Luke 15:20, 24, “So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him... ‘for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.”**