

Deut. 4:1-8

Embracing the Adventure . . . of being the people of God

January 13, 2008

God raised up Moses . . . used him to lead the people of Israel out of the land of slavery and burden . . . used the opportunity to show His great power . . . that there is no God but God . . .

And brought them to the base of Mt. Sinai . . . there God gave them His commandments . . .

The first commandment was, “thou shalt have no other gods before me . . .”

The God who brought them up out of Egypt did that for a reason . . . to make them His unique people . . . not just to get them out of Egypt . . . but to make them trophies of His grace and mercy . . . and power . . .

And because they were to express loyalty to God . . . the first commandment was, “thou shalt have no other gods before me . . .”

Exo 34:14-15 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), (15) lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice (ESV) . . .

At least 5 times as God gave them His Law, He directly and repeatedly commanded them that they were to have Him alone as God . . . and they were to never turn to other man-made idols . . .

But the people soon forgot what God did . . . they forgot His power . . . they forgot the wrath He displayed against the Egyptians . . .

At a place called Peor . . . And sacrificed offerings to the Moabite gods . . . particularly the fertility god . . . an idol called Baal . . . a god who was said to control thunder, rain, fertility and agriculture . . .

There, at Peor, they had indulged in gross immorality there before the idol Baal . . . which was the way of the followers of the false god Baal . . .

And had celebrated the Moabite religious ceremonies . . . offering sacrifices to statues of Baal . . . the fertility god of the pagans . . . bowing down to an idol . . .

All of which was clearly against the Law of God – Ex 34:15-16 . . . 20:3; 22:20; 23:24, 32 . . .

God was angry . . . in fact, Numbers 25 tells us that He was of “fierce anger” at His people disregarding His commands . . . and doing what He explicately said time and again they were not to do . . .

Moses records for us the account in Numbers 25, that the idol-worshippers, “. . . invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. (3) So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. (4) And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel."

Moses records for us that 24,000 people died that day . . . 24,000 people who worshiped Baal were destroyed . . .

God was not joking . . . following Him is a matter of life and death . . .

And yet, you & I can get a warped view of all of this, frankly . . .
b/c if we are not careful, we can put ourselves in a trap . . .

A trap of thinking that God's commandments are like a straitjacket upon us . . . and that our unsaved family and friends have much greater liberty than we . . . that they have freedom . . . and don't have God watching the way He watches us . . .

God, we think, limits us . . . tells us what we can't do . . . that His commandments and principles for our lives are constraining . . . they stifle us . . . and if God hadn't given us His rules for our lives, then we would be free to celebrate life and live to the fullest . . .

I am confident there are many unsaved people who have rejected the idea of following the Lord directly b/c of what we are discussing this morning . . . that if they follow Him, He has the right to rule and run their life . . . and perhaps you are in that situation this morning . . . not a follower . . . thinking about it . . . but one of the difficult issues for you is submission to Him . . .

I am also confident that many of us, if not all of us, who are believers, who are followers of Him . . . wrestle with these same issues . . . we like the idea of being saved from hell . . . but we are not pleased by His rules for our lives NOW . . .

And I could stand up here and tell us we are mistaken and wrong . . . or we can have God tell us why we are wrong . . .

And if you would like to see what God says, please open your Bible to Deut. 4 . . . that is page _____ if you are using a pew Bible . . .

If you haven't been with us for the past 2 Sundays, we are in a new series through the book of Deuteronomy, the last book that Moses

wrote before he died . . .

We've titled this series "Embracing the Adventure . . ." and we're discovering together that just as God brought His people to the Promised Land . . . that we as a church were in a wonderful place . . . [[Joe – need more here . . .]]

God has the people on the edge, the border of, the promised land . . . and they are going to go in and take that land for the Lord . . .

But before they do that, God has Moses bring them this message . . .

My dear friends, it is time we embrace the adventure of being God's People . . . by obeying His commands . . .

READ 4:1-8 . . .

1. Read vv. 1-4 . . . Moses tells them they are to hear . . . follow . . . to keep these . . .

not because they are some sort of straitjacket that takes away all of your liberty . . .

But because of the exact opposite . . . disobedience is the straitjacket . . . obedience brings such liberty . . .

He tells us about 24,000 people who thought God's laws were too constraining . . . to stifling . . . too difficult . . . and those 24,000 people died in one day . . .

While the rest, who rejoiced to obey the Word of God were living still . . .

There is a powerful lesson here . . . and the truth is, you and I are

very often backwards in our thinking . . .

We think God is making life difficult on us by telling us what we can and can't do . . .

When the exact opposite is true . . . God is telling us how to enjoy life . . . and that is by putting ourselves under His care . . . and His Word . . .

Psa 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

Jesus said, "Joh 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Peter confessed to Jesus, Joh 6:68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,

Joh 12:44-50 And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. (45) And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. (46) I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. (47) If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. (48) The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. (49) For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment-- what to say and what to speak. (50) And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

All who remained loyal to the LORD and refused to violate the conditions of the covenant were kept alive . . . – Num 25:4 . . .

my friend, we are wrong . . . God's commands upon our lives do not lead to suffering and self-pity . . . they lead to life . . .

For those who are not saved this morning . . . God's command upon you life at this very moment is to repent of your sin . . . Act 3:18-19 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. (19) Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,

God has commanded everyone to repent . . .

Act 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved . . .

If you are not saved this morning, there really is no good reason . . . His Law is life, not death . . . refusing to obey is death . . .

And those who decided to disobey the covenant would be destroyed . . . Hear the warning . . . God's word is life . . . failure to obey that Word is death . . .

2. But not only does obedience to God's law bring life . . .
.God's Laws Make Us Unique . . . vv. 5-8

the nation was about to enter the promised land . . . and since leaving Egypt 40 years ago, they had been isolated in the wilderness . . . just them and God . . .

But now, as they go into the land God promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, they are going to be surrounded by nations . . . by other people . . .

And Moses tells them, and us, that if we obey God's commands, not only do they bring life . . . they also make us unique . . .

READ vv. 5-8 . . .

God's way of doing things brings wisdom . . . and understanding . . .

They give direction . . . they give guidelines and principles that bring us to a better place in our lives . . . Pro 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life . . .

But not only do they make our lives better . . . these are more than just the guidelines for a successful life . . . (v. 6) . . . they were also a display for the pagan nations around the Jews that they were different . . . that they were God's people . . .

God says when we obey His Word, He will be on display in our lives . . .

The theology of the nations around them taught that their gods were far away . . . distant . . . that they were so busy and preoccupied with their own affairs that they couldn't be bothered by their subjects on earth . . . the gods of the gentiles were really just more of glorified humans . . . with busy schedules who could not really be involved in the lives of their followers . . .

In contrast to that, the God of Israel who, though He is utterly transcendent and wholly different from we humans, lives and moves among His people . . .

They would also have His Laws . . . the difference God brings is not just Himself . . . but He also gives His people his righteous guide for life . . .

The decrees of God are righteous in the sense that they enable those who obey them to achieve a God-ordained pattern or level of

expectation . . .

These "righteous" decrees of the Lord are what allow His people to live in a proper covenant relationship with God . . .

To live a life that is pleasing to the Lord . . . and brings Him glory . . .

Here at Great Hope . . . we are not a wonderful group of people who get together and love each other b/c we are all the same skin color . . . have the same ethnic background . . . or the same choice of schools . . . no . . .

And I submit to you that the reason people are amazed when they come here . . . I am told time and time again how friendly and loving this church is . . .

I submit to you, my friends, that that is not me . . . and it is not you . . . but it is God . . . who is being found in our presence by those who are outside us . . .

And they notice something is different about us . . .

About this church . . .

About this church family . . .

Is there a danger? Yes . . . and it is found back in verse 2 . . .

READ v. 2 . . .

Moses is not talking about your English Bible translation . . . no . . .

ADDING TO . . .

You can go places where, as believers, you are told exactly what to wear . . . what not to wear . . . what music to listen to . . . what schools to attend . . . what English translation to read . . .

All under the guise of godly commands . . .

That's wrong . . . we cannot, must not . . . add to God's Word . . .

You are free to have your standards, and we as a church must, but they are NOT commands of God . . . They do not equate to holiness and rightness with God . . .

We simply cannot take our standards and our preferences and pretend that they are someone equal to the Word of God . . .

TAKING AWAY . . .

He's talking about people who want the blessings of God . . . but who don't want to do things God's way . . .

They want God . . . and they want the blessings of God . . . but they don't want God's rule in their lives . . .

They want to do things their way . . .

There is a real danger for us to start taking away from God's Word . . . by ignoring what we don't like . . .

By giving ourselves excuses why we don't have to obey . . .

By saying we agree to follow the Lord here at church . . . but then, tomorrow, when we are out in the world . . . we ignore forget we are to be different . . .

Friend, God has placed you in that situation . . . where you get to

rub shoulders with unsaved people . . . not so you can hide your Christianty . . .

But rather, so you can be a bright light of His saving power and His ability to change lives . . .

God forbid we would talk about obeying the WofG here at church . . . and then refuse to live it out in the world . . .

Moses says that they were to live the Word . . . it brings life, not death, it brings wisdom . . . it also makes us different in our actions . . . our attitudes . . . our words . . .

As believers, the command is clear . . . Eph 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

We are commanded to not partake in nor listen to gossip . . . Pro 26:22 The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

And we can decide that we are going remember that God's commands bring life . . . and wisdom . . . and a testimony . . . so we can control our speech . . .

Or we can decide that we really don't want God to hamper our style . . . and our words can fly out like any unsaved person . . .

The commandment brings life . . .

As believers, we are commanded to worry about nothing and pray about everything . . .

And we can do that . . . b/c it is what the Word of God says . . . or we can choose our own way . . .

As believers, we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, strength, soul and mind . . .

As believers, children are instructed to submit to their parents . . . and parents are instructed to bring their children up under the nurture and admonition of the Lord . . .

We can obey the admonition to be ye kind, one to another, and forgiving each other, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you . . .

Or we can hold grudges . . . and hatred . . . and bitterness . . .

The command brings life . . .

Adding to . . . by our traditions . . . by our preferences . . . by our habits . . . by saying, "Well, I think . . ."

Taking away . . . by our traditions . . . our favorite genre of music . . . by our preferences . . . by our habits . . .

We are a unique people . . . because God is with us . . . and because we are obeying His Word . . .

Obedience to God . . . leads to a testimony in the world . . . which leads to evangelism . . .

I wonder if we don't have more evangelism here because we don't have more obedience to God here . . .