

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*February 16, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

The bulk of Deuteronomy is a series of laws from Chapter 12 to 26. In Chapter 27, Moses begins his final speech to the people by asking them to make a covenant. The covenant lists a series of curses (27:14-26, 28:15-68) and blessings (28:1-14) as well as promises. The covenant ends with this section after which Moses appoints Joshua to lead the people. The choice is stark and summarizes much of the teaching of the Old Testament. Disobedience leads to destruction while obedience leads to life. The rise and fall of the nations of Israel and Judah will be in the context of obedience and disobedience. The prophets begin to redefine obedience as an act of the heart. The New Testament does not negate obedience but rather emphasizes obedience as the by product of "loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways" as revealed in the prophets and ultimately in Jesus. In this light, life and prosperity are the results of an active and loving relationship with God rather than strict obedience to rituals.

## **Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:1-9**

After arguing that only the Spirit can reveal the spiritual mystery of God, Paul then states that they are not ready for that revelation because they are still focused on the wisdom of the world. This focus is evident by their focus on "I belong to Paul" or "I belong to Apollos". In Greek wisdom teaching, a student would train under a master. The student would then claim that they belonged to Plato or Aristotle. The people are treating Paul and Apollos as masters of a new wisdom teaching rather than apostles of Jesus. This is not a new human teaching but rather a spiritual reality. Paul points to this reality when he states, "you are God's field, God's building".

## **Commentary on Matthew 5:21-30**

Jesus follows the statement that he is the fulfillment of the law by showing how following the spirit of the law is much harder than the simple letter of the law. Taking two examples from the Ten Commandments, Jesus goes to the "heart" of the matter. While murder may be the end result, the path to murder begins with anger and a dehumanizing of the other person. By insulting and minimizing the worth of another by saying "You fool", it is easier to treat that person as less than a child of God. Anger and dehumanization become justifications for murder as seen repeatedly in history. Reconciliation is the only way to truly obey the law. At the root of reconciliation is the act of forgiveness rather than judgment. The issue of adultery also begins in the heart with lustful intentions. Adultery is redefine not as simply the sexual act but rather the desire to break the relational covenant. The woman then becomes the object of the broken relationship rather than a respected child of God. It is better to objectify the hand or eye and cut it off than to treat a child of God as less than human.

## **Sermon "Matter of the Heart" (*Sermon Video*)**

Growing up, my dad would tell me, "You either fish or cut bait". In other words, he was tired of waiting and wanted me to make a decision. After forty years in the wilderness of grumbling and complaining, Moses was ready for the Israelites to make a choice. You either follow God or you don't. There is no middle ground. Sometimes we need our options in simple terms. Like the people in Corinth, we want the kid's menu. Complex theology is like ordering filet mignon at a drive thru to eat on the road. We like things plain and simple. If you are an alcoholic, don't go to a bar. If you don't like crowds, avoid outdoor rock concerts. If something is causing you to sin, STOP! While cutting it off may sound extreme, the point is the same.

The Pharisees and Sadducees only offered the people the kid's menu and their

oversimplification led the people away from the spiritual heart of the matter. It is not enough just to obey the Ten Commandments. We are called to a greater understanding thru the Holy Spirit. It is not enough just to avoid adultery but rather we should treat people with respect and not as a means of gratification. It is not enough to avoid committing murder but rather we should root out all those emotions and prejudices that reduces the value of any human life. Anger and ridicule are simply the first steps in dehumanization. These same steps have taken place every time there has been a genocide. To truly obey the commandments of God, we must first begin by learning how to love our neighbor as ourselves. When we begin to view all of God's creation as precious, we begin to truly appreciate and love the Creator.