

Scripture Readings and Sermon

October 25, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Deuteronomy 31:14-23; 32:46-47; 34:1-5 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

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) ending in Chapter 30. The last three chapters transfers leadership from Moses to Joshua and contains Moses' final instructions before his death in Chapter 34. The promise made to Moses that the LORD would go with him is now given to Joshua. Knowing the struggles of the past, Moses urges the people to follow the law and teach the law so that they may prosper under the LORD. Moses, however, is prohibited from crossing because of the "ritual" of striking the rock with the staff in Numbers 20:7-13 against the LORD's express instructions (See commentary on Exodus 17:1-7). The LORD takes Moses to Mount Nebo in Jordan which overlooks the River Jordan valley. On a clear day, visitors today can see all of the regions described in 34:1-3.

Deuteronomy 31:23 "Be strong and bold"

What would be the last instructions you would give your grandchildren?

Would it be about your faith or something else?

What encouragement would you give them for the future?

What words of encouragement would your great grandparents give you during these times?

Commentary on Matthew 22:34-46 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

The events surrounding the question of the "greatest commandment" is different in the three synoptic gospels and is absent in the Gospel of John. Instead of focusing on the "greatest commandment" in the Gospel of John, Jesus offers them a "new commandment" to love as he has loved which is the fulfillment of the "greatest commandment". In Luke, the question comes after the mission of the seventy (10:25) long before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (19:28). In Mark, the question comes at the same time period as Matthew but it is not to test Jesus. Instead, Mark has a scribe who is seeking wisdom and after answering Jesus says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God"(12:34). Matthew combines the location of Mark and the test element of Luke into this encounter with the Pharisees. After giving his answer, Jesus then tests the Pharisees concerning the nature of the Messiah which thematically links back to the question of authority. Referring to Psalm 110, Jesus points out that the LORD said to my lord in Hebrew uses the divine name for the first LORD and the word "adonai" for the second lord. David would not call his son "adonai" so this lord must be someone other than the "son of David".

Matthew 22:42 What do you think of the Messiah?

Why does Jesus follow the statement about the greatest commandment with a questioned concerning the Messiah?

Is it because they both rely on biblical knowledge?

Or is the Messiah somehow linked to love?

Could the Messiah be the One who perfectly loves God and humanity?

What does this say about the Messiah (Christ in Greek) and Peter's confession the Jesus is the Messiah?

Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2:1–10 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Paul recalls their imprisonment in Philippi because he cast an unclean spirit out of a slave girl who earned money for her captives by being a fortuneteller (Acts 16:16-39) and their successful teaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-5) before they were driven out by an angry mob. Paul then contrasts those who use the word of God for deceit, impure motives, trickery, public approval, greed, and greed with Paul's approach. Rather than taking, Paul gives even his life as an example of God's loving care. This means of proclamation is in a manner pleasing to God, just, and blameless.

1 Thessalonians 2:10 "how devout, upright, and blameless our conduct"

Do you live in a way that attracts people to God?

What does it mean to be devout or living in a manner worthy of God?

Do we live a just and upright life? What is just in the sight of God?

Job was described as just and blameless. Did that mean he had no problems?

Sermon "Are We Living Holiness?" ([Sermon Video](#))

As Moses is facing his impending death, he writes down the story not only of his faith but the faith of his ancestors. The first five books of the Bible, known as the Torah in Judaism, is often called the books of Moses. They tell the story not only of the Exodus story from Egypt to the promised land but how the people ended up in Egypt and what it means to be in a covenant relationship with God. A relationship based not simply on laws but on love. The laws are there to remind us when we have strayed of the love we are called to live. The lessons of both success and failure at that loving relationship are recorded in these first five books. Moses wanted people not only to remember these lessons but to pass these lessons on to their children. By learning from their mistakes when their faith was weak will give them reason to rely more on faith so that the glory of the LORD may be more richly experienced.

These books of Moses can be both long and difficult reading (Numbers and Leviticus) for children as well as adults. Getting lost in the "weeds", it is easy to loss sight of the main point that Moses is making. When Jesus is asked about this, he replied that love of God and love of our neighbor as ourselves is the main point of the law, the greatest commandment. It is when we loss sight of that loving relationship that "religion" becomes an institution and children along with adults begin to leave. We live in a world full of rules and regulations but is desperately in need of authentic love. Love not based on self gratification or illusive fantasy but a love that surrounds us with a firm foundation of peace, joy, hope, and faith. A love that knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that not even death can keep us from the one we love and who loves us.

Saying we love and loving, however, are often two very different things. An old saying regarding children is that they are "little pitchers with big ears". We fill those pitchers more by our actions than our words. A church that proclaims to love but acts with legalism and condemnation will soon find that even their words fall on deaf ears. A church, however, who doesn't always love as they should but struggles to love the best they can will find people are attracted by their authenticity. Love in a world of division and judgment becomes a light of hope in a faithless land. The call to holiness is nothing less than a call to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, he reminds them that their faith which is seen throughout the region is not simply the result of hearing the gospel but seeing it in the lives of Paul. He uses three words to describe this which translates from the Greek as holiness, righteousness, and blameless. The

word translated as holiness means a life lived in a manner pleasing to God. Holiness is following God's will as our own so that the name of the LORD is glorified. This is Jesus at Gethsemane when he says, "Not my will but thy will be done". The word righteousness comes from a term that means to live honorably in your dealings with everyone, show no partiality but rather fairness to all. Jesus showed this when he ate with tax collectors and prostitutes as well as leaders of the synagogues and Nicodemus. The last word, blameless, means to live in such a way that one can face their past actions without guilt, shame, or regret. To love oneself is to accept our self for who we are and then live in a way that honors that the child of God. From that blameless life, we are able to face whatever comes with the assurance Jesus showed when he said, "Father forgive them. They know not what they do." Living out holiness, righteousness, and in a blameless manner proclaims the message of love louder than any sermon ever could. Are we living holiness?