

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 2, 2018

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. **2) Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you...** **6) Observe them carefully**, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." **7) What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?** **8) And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?**

Dear Friends;

All right now. Listen up! Ladies and Gentlemen may I have your attention please. Attention on the Fair Grounds. I'm sure you've heard these modern variations on the old time phrases: Hear ye, hear ye! Lend me your ears! Such phrases are intended to get us to stop what we are doing and to pay attention. The announcements which follow often call for additional steps of action.

Under God's direction, Moses had assembled the Lord's people and was addressing them as they were about to undergo a radical change in their lives. Soon they would be settling down in the land of promise after spending their lives as desert nomads. Often life changing events call for new ways of looking at things and doing things. But one has to be careful not to get too carried away.

Sometimes when people face life-changing situations – they are tempted to set aside the past and want to do everything different. Moses cautioned God's people to resist that temptation as he reminded them to hang on to the unchanging Word of the Lord. The Words the Lord had given them in the past would not have to be altered to fit in with their new lifestyle. Rather they were to take that Word with them as they entered Canaan.

Much has changed down through the centuries since the time of Moses. People are tempted to regard much of what God wrote as old fashioned and out of touch with the realities of our world today. Even some Christian churches have chosen to ignore more and more of what God has to say in his Word. However, the passing of time has not invalidated the words of the Holy Spirit. The temptation to alter the words of sacred Scripture to conform to the circumstances of our lives, to bring them in line with present day worldly wisdom, to make them more acceptable to modern tastes – is essentially the same type of temptation that confronted Israel as Moses addressed them in our text. However, when God's people and the church conform to the world around them – they lose the wisdom of God. Only as we cling faithfully to the Word will we have the wisdom and understanding to enlighten a world living in the darkness of sin.

As Moses did centuries ago – I stand before you this morning calling for your attention to share God's Word with you. Listen up!

Theme: Hear the Word of the Lord!

1. Guard it carefully
2. Observe it faithfully

God was about to give the nation of Israel a wonderful and undeserved gift – the land of promise. In his grace God had called Abraham from the worship of false Gods and gave him the promise of the land which these people were about to receive as their home. God also gave Abraham the promise of a Savior and an eternal home. Previous generations had not paid attention to God’s promises. They turned toward false gods and often grumbled and complained about the way the true God treated them. So, Moses begins with a reminder of God’s grace – a reminder which we also need. In his grace, God has treated us in ways we do not deserve. (Psalms 103:10-13) **He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.**

What Moses has to say is to be understood in the context of God’s grace and mercy. As Moses calls on us to guard the Word of the Lord carefully, he urges us to do so as an action of faith!

Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 2) Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

The decrees and laws included more than a list of does and don’ts. It’s not just the limits that God places on his people. It’s also the decrees of blessing and the pronouncements or judgments of grace and forgiveness. “Hear ye, hear ye”, Moses proclaims. Give me your ears – guard the words of the Lord.

Martin Luther made this observation about this text: “Before Moses commands or teaches anything, he sees to it that it is not violated or changed so that nothing is added to it or taken away from it.”

Even before giving the people the Lord’s commands, they were to understand that this was the Word of the Lord and that what Moses said was to be treated with respect and reverence. Hear and follow, Moses proclaimed in verse 1...do not change Moses proclaims in verse 2.

God’s word is like the perfect recipe. If you add or something or try to enhance that recipe you will ruin it. On the other hand, if you leave out an ingredient or change the directions you will ruin the recipe. It doesn’t pay to substitute cheaper ingredients or to skimp – the recipe needs to be followed exactly.

Here Moses extends a caution to the person who feels something is lacking the Scriptures – some bit of speculative knowledge concerning God, some detail of the afterlife, answers to questions that the Word does reveal, a condemnation of a behavior that the Scriptures do not condemn. Don’t try to fill in the gaps...don’t try to enhance the Scriptures with your own reason and ideas. On the other hand, Moses also has something to say to the person who finds something offensive to his reason or emotions and takes it upon himself to trim off some of the ragged edges by changing or ignoring the Word so it fits his personal preferences.

Sadly Church history provides ample evidence that Moses words have fallen on deaf ears – God’s people: the church has not always taken a firm stand only on the Scriptures. So-called modern methods of Scriptural interpretation have destroyed the authority of the Word in many churches. Luther exposed the errors and additions of the papacy at the time of the Lutheran reformation – errors and additions like indulgences, the teaching of purgatory, forbidding the clergy to marry, the adoration of saints, and a denial of justification by faith alone. Today we have religious conservatives who deny the complete sinfulness of man, the real presence of Christ’s body and blood together with bread and wine in the sacrament, the saving power of baptism even for infants. Then there are those no longer condemn the sins God condemns such as homosexuality or abortion.

And finally, there are those who see the Scriptures as more of a guide book for understanding current world events than as the Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Moses, words: Hear and guard -- apply to us as individual Christians and as a Church body. Don't abandon God's perfect formula – cling to it in all of its truth and purity. As Christians, you have the right to demand to hear the whole will and counsel of God and as a pastor I have the responsibility to share with you all that God says whether or not it is what people want to hear. Moses' words instructing us to guard the word carefully are just as appropriate for us as they were when he stood before Israel and proclaimed, **Hear now, O Israel the decrees and laws I am about to give you...Observe them carefully!**

Like Israel of old, Christians are a chosen people...who have been called out of the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of grace and forgiveness to proclaim the praises of our Savior God. Listen to Moses explain: **Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." 7) What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? 8) And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?**

With these words, Moses called attention to the special relationship that God established with his people in the OT. The Savior of the world would come from this nation. Therefore, he would treat them as his treasured possession. He would give to them his wisdom and understanding. His protection and presence would be obvious to the nations. Only the God of Israel would hear and answer the prayers of his people. Only the people of Israel had a divinely given law to govern them.

The nations around Israel all had their gods, but they were only helpless blocks of wood and stone. Those who worshipped them were left without any help at all – think of how the prophets of Baal called to Baal send fire to burn up their sacrifices at the time of Elijah and were not heard. However, when Elijah called on the Lord, God sent a fire that consumed the water saturated sacrifice which he had prepared as well as the stone altar which he had built to reassure Elijah and the heathen people that the Lord his God was with Elijah and all believers in every need.

A further review of OT history helps us see that God kept this promise that through his faithful people other nations would be drawn to him. Think for example of how the Queen of Sheba sought out Godly Solomon. Remember how Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel were able to enjoy favored status among the wise men of Babylon. Recall, too, how the wisemen from the east came seeking the King of the Jews as they were guided by a star. In more recent times, former communist governments have sought the wisdom which can be found among Christians – some of those governments even invited the church to assist them in their efforts to maintain an educated and peaceful society – of course they missed the point, but they opened the door for the proclamation of true and lasting peace in Christ Jesus.

That brings us to a personal application of these words for our lives. Centuries have come and gone -- yet there is value in faithfully observing the teachings of God's word – trusting in the promises of God and living in keeping with his will.

First of all there is no other way of salvation other than the one God has planned and prepared for us and announced to us in the Scripture. Secondly, God's promises to bless those who believe his Words and promises inspire our lives of faith. We gladly turn to the decrees of the Lord to guide our faith and our life as we express our thanks to the Lord for the wonderful wisdom of the Gospel that solved the dilemma of our sin by pointing us to our Savior. Thirdly, our hope, joy, and faithfulness to God's Word will not go unnoticed. Some in the

world will persecute us for our faithfulness to the Word. Others will ask us for the reason for the hope that we have. In each situation, the Lord will be glorified. So dear friends listen to words of the Lord – live in keeping with his commands and will for your life. Take the words of his laws and decrees – his commands and his blessings together with his pronouncements of judgment and forgiveness to heart.

It's true the times may be a changin' but we have the unchanging word of the Lord as a solid foundation in our ever changing world – Hear the Word of the Lord: Guard it carefully. Observe it faithfully. Amen.