

Part 14: God's Third Way

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Today's sermon is a sermon about the gospel.

If you've ever wondered what is at the center of Christianity, this sermon is for you. If you've ever wondered what the relationship is between your works and the grace of Jesus, this sermon is for you. If you've ever wondered what the gospel is, this sermon is for you.

Now in a very realistic way, every sermon we preach at Sovereign Hope is about the gospel. The gospel is, as the Apostle Paul says, what saved us in the past, what strengthens us in the present, and what sustains us in the future. The gospel is the sum and scope of the Christian life.

But let's not forget that the gospel, the Greek word "euangelion," means "good news." Before the gospel is a system of theology, before the gospel is even seen clearly in the person of Jesus, the gospel is simply good news to those who need it.

This passage today in Deuteronomy is good news. While this passage is not the conclusion of the book of Deuteronomy it is Moses' pastoral climax of the sermon he began 29 chapters ago.

Up to this point Moses has reminded God's people of their faithlessness and God's faithfulness. He reminds them that God has done wonderful things for them and he has many more wonderful things to do to them if only they would walk as his people. How do they know what God's people look like? God gives them his law.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might," this, says Moses, is the heart of God's law. What does it take to be God's people? Love the Lord with all that you have. He then went into the details of this law by providing fourteen chapters of case studies and rules as to how God's people are to show their love for God.

And last week as Moses began his concluding summary of the law he stressed the two fold realities of it: blessings for those who obey, and curses for those who disobey.

And after presenting these two ways to live, he kindly informs them that they are not going to obey God's law. They won't be able to earn the blessing because they won't keep the law. Their life isn't going to reap the blessing of God, but instead the punishment of God.

But as we saw last week Moses ended that passage with this: **Deuteronomy 29:29**. God has given us clear things, but there are also secret things which belong to God. In other words Moses is hinting that even though the clear reality of this life is two-fold, blessing and curse, that's not necessarily the end.

In God's sovereign power, he is able to make a third way. And it is this the not-so-secret-secret of this third way which unfolds historically over the pages of scripture. This third way, is the way of mercy. This mercy, this good news for those who know they don't measure up, is the heart of the gospel.

Our passage today is, I believe, one of the clearest proclamations of the gospel we have in the Old Testament. What we are going to see today are four aspects of mercy in Deuteronomy 30: **Mercy Apart from the Law, Mercy changes our hearts, Mercy draws near to us, and Mercy calls us to respond.**

Our passage opens today with this **Deuteronomy 30:1-3.**

When God's people have been scattered and displaced from the Promised Land, because they were unable to live in blessing and instead chose the curse, there will be a time where they return to God and God has mercy on them.

This is our first point today: **Mercy Apart from the Law.** This is something which in itself is amazing.

If you aren't familiar with the story of the Bible, God made promises with several individuals prior to the giving of the law. God made a creation covenant with Adam and Eve, they were going to be God's people, living in God's place in God's direct presence. Why? Not because they earned it or asked for it, but because God wanted to invite people into his love.

Even after sin ruined the garden, God covenanted himself to Noah after the flood and said, "I'll never again wipe out the whole world because of their sin." Why? Not because humanity earned it, but because God wanted to redeem people from sin.

Then God came to Abraham and said, "I'm going to be your God and you are going to be the father of my people." Why did God choose Abraham and what did Abraham do to earn this blessing? Nothing, God made a promise to Abraham because God was a God who wanted to bless people with his promise.

If you've been reading along in our Bible reading plan, you've noticed a problem with this. Even though God chose to freely give his promise and his blessing to people, God's people had a pretty good track record of ruining everything and even at times running from God's promise.

The people couldn't stay in the lane of God's promise, so God brought the law. The law came after the promise and it acted as a sort of bumper system in the bowling alley of God's covenant. People were unaware that gutters were dangerous, so God put up the law which defined the boundaries of blessing so that the people would live in the blessing of God's promise.

The law came to define the edges of God's promise. If you obey and stay in the lane, you'll get to where God wants you to be. But if you head for the gutter, you will miss out on all the goodness God has for you.

The law brought definition to the truth that existed long before the law: Living life in God's promise is the best life, living life outside of God's promise is a dangerous one.

The law outlined the blessings of obedience and the dangers of sin. But here, God gives mercy to his people who have jumped the bumpers. The law doesn't provide mercy. That's not the point of the law.

This mercy isn't according to the law, it is according to the promise of the God who gave the law. There is nothing in the law that stipulates God would be merciful to those who turned away from God's promise. But because God is a gracious and promise keeping God, he made a way for mercy not according to what his people would do, but according to what God would do.

However it might seem that God's mercy would be contingent on God's people. And in a way that's true, but in a way it's not true. Let's read this **Deuteronomy 30:1-10**.

So God does make it clear: mercy is conditional. It is conditional upon you turning to God, literally repenting, and loving God with all your heart and with all your soul. So you would think that as soon as God's people start being punished for their sin that they would realize this and turn.

The problem is they don't. God's people, even when they are being subjected to judgment, rarely turn back to God as he called them to. Moses says that if God's people turn, he would have mercy on them.

The problem was these people didn't act like God's people. The summary of the law is to love God, but as a whole Israel chose to keep all the external aspects of the law and neglect this. They wore the right clothes, ate the right foods, showed up to the right events. But in the Old Testament we see a sharp divide between those who belonged to Israel physically, and those who belonged to Israel spiritually.

Paul picks up this point in **Romans 2:28-29**. In other words Paul is saying that for anyone to belong to God, it cannot be belonging from the outside-in: church attendance and religious community are not sufficient. To truly belong to God, it must begin from the inside out. From the circumcision of the heart.

The Old Testament shows at times revivals of this heart change. But as a whole God's people rest in their physical belonging to Israel and not their spiritual belonging to God. But look at the promise which God made in **Deuteronomy 30:6**. How will God's people receive mercy apart from the law? By turning to God. But what if they won't turn to God? Then God will do something about it. He will circumcise their hearts, he will change their spiritual anatomy so that they will be able to desire God and therefore receive his mercy.

This is what is called "The New Covenant" and is what the OT looks forward to. Look at what is spoken hundreds of years later by the prophet Jeremiah: **Jeremiah 31:31-34**. What does he mean when he says that "no one will teach his neighbor"? It means that the divide between the physical and spiritual people of God has been reconciled. All of God's people will know God because he has given them a heart for himself. To belong to God is to relationally know God.

Where does this happen? Where does God change the hearts of people who are stuck in sin so that he might himself cause them to seek out his mercy? At the cross of Jesus. **Colossians 2:9-14**.

Do you see that mercy is grace twice over? It is a grace that God would offer mercy to a people who don't deserve it. And it is a grace that God would himself change the hearts of sinners so that they would seek and find mercy. It's not only a grace which is offered by God, it is a grace which is applied by God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Faith in Jesus Christ is the greatest miracle because it is a complete and total act of God made accessible through the simple act of faith and repentance.

And it's here where we see **Mercy changes our hearts**.

The primary result of mercy is that our hearts are changed. Because the problem for each of us, whether we listened to Moses on the shores of the Jordan, or we heard Paul write to the church in Colossae, is that we have bad hearts.

Think of it this way. Imagine if I gave each of you a free membership to a gym of your choice. That's pretty gracious. But the truth of the matter is, unless you see the fruit of the gym as worthwhile, you'll be more comfortable sitting at home on the couch. If all God did was say, "Here's free access to mercy, just return and worship me with all of your heart," human history would show that even though it's a gracious offer, we simply wouldn't be interested. But here we see that God gives us a membership to that gym, and then changes our hearts so that we would actually desire to go into it.

Just as God created out of his own desire to create, just as God promised out of his own desire to promise, God converts hearts out of his own desire to convert hearts. Conversion is necessary for salvation, repenting, changing direction, living in a new way. But even the power for conversion comes by the grace of God's hand.

He cuts away our false affections so that we might belong to him at a heart level. God's grace goes far deeper in our lives than we can ever know. To respond to Jesus on the cross by turning to him is to realize that God has already been doing work out in front of you.

In fact, all of mercy highlights how God seeks us out.

The ESV translates the phrase in Deuteronomy 30:1 as "when you call these things to mind." But other translations better communicate the sense of this phrase when they say that at some point in your sins, "you will come to your senses."

What a wonderful description of conversion. Conversion is the moment where we finally come to our senses and realize that we can't do anything to save ourselves. It's the bucket of cold water which wakes our sleepy souls. It's this conversion which calls us to turn to Jesus Christ.

But even this "coming to your senses" is already an act of grace. In Ezekiel 36, the prophet Ezekiel also looks forward to this New Covenant heart, but look at the order the order of this awakening in **Ezekiel 36:26-27, 29a, 31**. We only come to our senses after God has already begun his process of changing our hearts.

You see to be saved by God through Jesus Christ, to be given mercy apart from the law is to realize how far God has sought you out.

In 2018 the world watched as rescue efforts were underway to save a youth soccer team trapped deep in a flooded cave system in Thailand.

The rescue operation required the world's most elite divers to navigate their way, often forcing themselves to squeeze and crawl, through flooded, zero-visibility passageways in order to reach the boys. The cave system was so long, and had to be navigated so slowly and carefully that rescue teams had to create a system for running fresh oxygen tanks to strategic points in the cave so that rescuers themselves wouldn't run out of air.

And once these expert rescuers found the team, they were confronted with another challenge. How do we get twelve scared kids out of a cave system that gave a team of expert divers all the challenges they could manage.

Afterwards, the New York Times asked a former U.S. Navy dive officer if American troops are trained for such rescue operations. And he said "No," simply for the reason that such rescue operations are too dangerous to even practice.

This Thai rescue operation was nothing compared to the complexities and length God went through to save us. God knows right where you are, and Jesus isn't intimidated to bring you out.

If you have ever felt unamazed at your salvation, if you have thought to be alone and beyond God's care. Consider the depth of mercy: **Deuteronomy 30:4**.

God sought to bring his lost people back to him by sending his son into the cave for us, knowing that it would demand his death as punishment for our sins so that we might receive his mercy.

This is the gospel: The good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us back to God. Just as Moses, Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied, the gospel bring us back to the wonderful promise and presence of God. It makes us his people so that we might enjoy the blessing of being his children.

And here's the kicker, God has told us about it.

The biggest danger to those who claim to be agnostic is the doctrine of God's revelation. Far from claiming that we can't know if there's a God, God in his mercy speaks to us. He wants to be known. He broke the silence so that we might find our way back to him.

This is our next point: **Mercy draws near to us**.

Read with me **Deuteronomy 30:11-14**.

Moses is reminding God's people of his grace in even telling them this. Yes, God's law at times may be hard to keep, but you can keep it. It's not hard. I often say this to people during pre-marriage: "The key to sexual purity in engagement is to not do anything sexually impure during engagement."

The concept is simply, you can do it. The problem comes when you choose to not do it. When you think there might be something better out there for you. That's why God must change our hearts.

But this is where Moses says, "I've brought this to you so that you can see it!" You don't need to experiment to find what it takes to please God and experience his blessing, it's right here."

God did the work for you in bringing it to you.

Paul quotes this passage in Romans 10 to express a similar tone: **Romans 10:5-9**.

Paul takes Moses message and shows the fullness of it in regards to the gospel. He says that when it comes to faith you don't need to say, "Who will ascend to heaven?" Because no one can bring Christ

down. You don't need to say, "Who will descend into the Abyss?" That's to say, "Who is going to go bring Christ out of the grave?"

What's Paul's point here? The gospel isn't dependent upon your work. You are not declared righteous because you can go up to heaven and bring Jesus down, Jesus came down on his own. You don't need to be declared righteous because you helped bring Jesus back from the dead, Jesus was raised by the power of God. We don't summon Jesus to save us.

Instead what are you to do? Realize that it's already in your heart, it's so near to you. You simply need to believe that Jesus did everything for you and you will be saved.

We have an innate tendency, both Christian and Non-Christian to rest in our work. Even if we believe salvation by grace alone we are prone to say, yes but how can I continue to earn this grace!

My son is to the point in his life where he loves to ask hypothetically impossible questions. We were driving home from school the other day and he asks me: "Dad what happens if people sin in heaven?" And I said, "Well Owen, there will be no sin in heaven because God will have totally redeemed us from wanting to sin." He said, "Yeah, but what if you did sin?" I said, "I mean nothing would happen because there is no punishment, because there's no sin." To which he said, "But what if there was sin."

To which I said, "There can't be sin in heaven. If there were sin, it wouldn't be heaven, and because it's heaven, there's no sin." The truth is we seek to ask God daily the same impossible hypotheticals when it comes to grace: "Yes it's grace, but what if it's grace plus zeal in worship?" "No, that's not grace." "Yeah, yeah, I get that, but what if it was grace plus my own ability to make myself feel miserable over my sin."

To which Paul says, "Grace plus anything isn't grace, if it's grace plus anything, it's not grace."

We just like the Israelites want to try and find something beyond the gospel, as if God didn't really reveal all we needed to know. And we can burden ourselves in trying to find relief in our efforts.

Charles Spurgeon says it this way: **"Like the fascination that attracts the gnat to the candle that burns its wings, people by nature fly to the law for salvation and cannot be driven from it...We cannot get men away from it even though we show them how sweetly Jesus stands between them and it."**

Jesus made a third way of mercy so that we no longer have rest on our works but on the works which Jesus already did. We simply have to receive them by faith. If you are a Christian who is always burdened by the burden of maintaining your own salvation, this is how near rest is to you.

Both Paul and Moses emphasize the nearness of God's gospel to people. That is true for us all.

A group of friends and I once spent the night in a parking lot in Yosemite National Park.

Three of us slept in the cab of the truck, and one of us slept in the back of the truck on top of all our gear, including our snacks. So you can imagine the emotions that man went through the next morning when we woke up and saw a car a few dozen feet down the parking lot had been ransacked by a grizzly that night.

Here he was sleeping in an oversized Twinkie, garnished with goodies, and he had no idea how close he was to the bear.

If you aren't a believer, we are so glad you are here today, but I want to warn you, you have walked dangerously near to salvation. In Acts 17, Paul is preaching to a group of people who have never heard the gospel and Paul says this: "This God of the Bible is not far from each one of you."

How do you know God is not far from you? Because you are right now hearing the proclamation of God's gospel which brings people to himself. I pray that you might turn in light of what God is already doing and confess with your own heart and be saved.

This is what Moses wants us to see in this text: **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**.

Here is our last point this morning: **Mercy calls us to respond**.

As a father, one of my privileges is having some sort of right to the food on the plates of any of my children. There are often times where I'll steal a bit of food from their plate and they will, say "Dad that's mine," and what I always tell them is that "I'm checking it for poison."

I want them to know that this food is safe to eat.

Brothers and sisters, the cross shows us that sin is poison and that faith in Jesus Christ is life. Choose life. There is nothing more to prove than what God has proven in the gospel. The wages of sin is death, but the free gift is life in Jesus Christ.

Look back at the astounding truth Moses gave in **Deuteronomy 30:9**. This God wants to delight in you by saving you with all the riches of mercy in Jesus Christ. Why would you not want to choose this life? Turn, repent, and be saved.

And if you've done that, if God has changed your heart, called you to repentance and given you Jesus Christ, what's next?

Look at verse 20: Love God, obey God, and hold fast to God.

This is our response: love, obedience and endurance.

Brothers and sisters, the sum of our life comes down to our ability to glorify God and fulfill his mission. Where does this start today? Loving God with the heart he has changed, obeying God because we've seen how his commands are not burdensome, and clinging to God in all things because we know that he and he alone is our life.

While each of these responses are responses that we must consciously make, they are all responses which rely on mercy and grace which God has already given. We love God because in his mercy he loved us when we were yet sinners. We obey God because in his grace he gave us commands which are not burdensome and lead us to joy even if at a great cost. And we hold fast to God, because Jesus has held fast to us. Brothers and sisters, this is good news, so today choose life.

