

Part 5: Hope and Holiness

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November 3rd, 2019

My wife and I are to a stage of parenting where all of our kids are mobile, but none of our kids know how to swim without a floaty. Which means that anytime we vacation around water, we share with them all sorts of reasons for celebration, but we also warn them of dangerous concerns.

We want them to know that there will be a water and a boats, and we want to affirm them of all the good times they will have. But we also want them to know that if they are not careful they will most certainly die. Every summer my parents take our older kids to the lake and Sarah and I scare them straight. We tell them that if they don't listen to Oma and Opa, they could get very hurt and maybe even die. But despite this we tell them that if they obey all of the fear, all of the rule keeping will be worth it.

And why do we talk to our kids like this? Because we love them and we want what is best for them. And we know that conversations like this are for their good, because God, our perfect father has conversations with his children just like this for our good.

And it is this kind of firm but optimistic discussion that God is going to have with Israel through Moses in Deuteronomy 7 and 8 today. As the people have been reminded of God's faithfulness, they have heard in the 10 Commandments the primary stipulations of the covenant and now Moses is going to begin to describe the terms of the covenant itself.

In other words what we are going to see in our passage today are repeated messages of confidence and concern: confidence that God will do what he said he will do and it will go well with you, but also concern that disobedience will lead to terrible things, even death itself.

Five times in this passage God promises great success which will come as God continues to care for his people. But we also see five times in this passage where God warns even his people of the dangers of rejecting God's wisdom.

And the central passage in our text today is going to be **Deuteronomy 7:6-11**. In this text you hear not only confidence and concern, wonder and warning, but you hear the motivation for all of this: You are a people holy to the Lord your God.

These ideas of holiness, confidence and concern are going to be our main themes today and here is what we are going to see broadly: **A holy God sets his people apart as holy** [chapter 7, God is preparing them for what is in the Land] and **A holy people sets God apart as holy** [chapter 6, God is preparing them for what is in their hearts].

But before we dive too far into those two points I want to spend a little bit of time talking about the first few verses we will read today. Because in this text God says some hard and shocking things. Read with me **Deuteronomy 7:1-5**.

Here God begins to call Israel to warfare and he also defines what this warfare will look like against the Canaanites who live in the land. It is in a sense to be total destruction. We already saw a glimpse of this

back in chapters 2 and 3, and here today we need to take a moment to pause and consider the violence that the great, holy and loving God of the Bible is prescribing to his people.

We will talk about this idea little more when we get to Deuteronomy 20 where God talks more in detail about the prescriptions and limits of Israel's warfare. But right now there are four things I want us to know regarding God's commands for violence here.

First, this is a special circumstance in the story of scripture. God is bringing his physical nation state into a physical land, and as a result there will be physical war. But outside of this conquest of the Promise Land, God doesn't tell his people to do this. This is not only true in the New Testament where the shape of God's people is no longer primarily ethnic, but spiritual. But it is also true in the remainder of the Old Testament.

When Israel returns from exile into the land, they find it occupied by people from all sorts of background, but there are no commands given to destroy them like this. This is a unique situation attached to God's redemptive program to bring Israel into the land.

Second, is that these nations are not innocent and we will continue to see this as Deuteronomy progresses. Part of Israel's conquest of them is also God's divine judgment on a terribly wicked people. The people in the land are sacrificing their own infants and selling their children into prostitution for the sake of their own hedonistic and violent lifestyles. It is in the face of such wickedness that we see the difficulty but also the necessity of God's wrath. But we also see how just God is towards wickedness because in 7:4 and 8:20 God warns Israel that even if they were to live like this or disobey God, they too would be judged. God deals with all wickedness fairly. And as we see in Romans 6:23, the wages of sin is death.

Third, we see that it is not a wholesale extermination of a people group. We don't see the commandment to create death squads roaming through the land. In fact Moses has already assumed that there will be other people in the land. Instead the military conquests of Israel center on the places of influence, namely the established cities and the places of pagan worship.

And lastly, we see even in these prescriptions the mercy of God. After Moses finishes this sermon, Joshua leads the people into battle at Jericho. But who do we meet in Jericho? We meet Rahab, who is not only a foreigner, but a prostitute. But Rahab, who has heard of the God of Israel, hides Israel's spies and she and her whole family are spared. More than that, Rahab herself marries into Israel and becomes a great, great (many times over!) grandmother of Jesus himself.

Is this because God didn't mean the commands he gave here? No. It just means that God is gracious even in judgment for those who seek him. God's promise to Abraham was that through God's people the nations would be blessed. And as the Old Testament unfolds we see wicked people being punished, but we also see wicked people responding by grace and being saved. That's the nature of our good and gracious God. God takes sin seriously, but delights to give serious grace to those who seek him.

The reason why God is prescribing conquest is ultimately so that dangerous things might be dealt with and good things might flourish. God wants his people to be distinct in the Land they are going into, and to aid in that distinction there is a putting out of things which call them away from God.

With that as a sort of preface let's look at our first point today: **A holy God sets apart his people as holy.**

Immediately after Moses prescribes the conquest he provides the reason for such a command:
Deuteronomy 7:6.

God has chosen you as holy. Holiness is the reality through which we view all the commands of God. So we need to understand what "holy" is. For many of us we equate holiness to perfection. But that's not how the world is used here.

How do we know that? Well next week we will see in stunning detail that the people of Israel are far from perfect. They are broken and they are sinful. Just like you and me. Which might be why many of us give up on living, what we might call "holy lives." We start out on the path to holiness and we encounter some real hardships and we quickly realize that we will never be free from failures and setbacks. And because of that we stop trying.

But all of God's word is grace to those who listen to him. Did you see what Moses said: **Deuteronomy 7:6.**

You are a people holy. Moses isn't saying, one day you will be a people holy. He's saying that you already are. So what does holy mean? This is important for us today because one of the primary names the New Testament authors give to believers is that of "Saints" which is from the root word "hagios" meaning, "to be made holy."

Holy simply means, to be set apart. To use another theological word, it is to be sanctified.

Kanye West, the celebrity and hip-hop artist, just released a gospel album. Kanye is a very successful recording artist but his new album was distinct. So distinct that he asked the staff working on the album to abstain from pornography and maintain celibacy during it.

He knew that this project, in comparison to others when he wasn't saved, was meant to be distinct. Different. Set apart.

And here Moses is saying to the people of Israel, you are set apart. Already. How do they know they are holy? Because God chose them to be his own treasured possession.

Read on: **Deuteronomy 7:6-11.**

How do you know you are holy? You are holy if God has called you to himself in loving deliverance. How do you know if God has called you to himself in love? Well that's what Moses is after here isn't it: if you love him and obey him.

We will talk more about this next week, but isn't this a wonderful picture into redemption? Why did God choose Israel? Out of all the nations why did God choose Israel? Why would God choose to wake your heart to the gospel? Out of all the people in the world? Because he loves you. To experience the salvation of God is to experience the love of God.

Did you see that? Moses added no motivation to God's saving work other than God's unmerited love. And God's love sets us apart to be his own treasured possession. And when a pure and loving God chooses us, saves us and bring us home, it would make sense that he desires faithfulness right?

Because God loves us, because God saves us, it is reasonable that he would desire us to be set apart for him and him alone. If you don't think that's reasonable, you might have some awkward conversations with your spouse one day. And wouldn't we want a spouse who is jealous for our affection? Especially when the spouse is as pure, faithful and loving as God is.

That's what God is after when he is after our holiness, he wants a pure and beneficial relationship. We already know God is always faithful to his end, but will Israel be faithful to their end?

Moses says when you go into the land, there are going to be things which attempt to ruin your set apartness to God and try to make you just like the world. And for each of these temptations Moses makes it clear that loving them over God is equal to hating God. And with such a breach of covenant, not only do you miss out on the wonderful blessing of God, but you actually find yourself under God's judgment.

Moses identifies three primary threats in the land: False worship, godless relationships and the allure of wealth. Look at these warnings: **Deuteronomy 7:3-5, 25-26.**

Do you realize that for Israel and for us today, there are always going to be external threats to our exclusive and holy relationship with God? Do you think that maybe those three threats are still powerful in our world today?

I've seen in my days lots of reasons why non-believers stay non-believers. But I don't think I've seen more professing believers walk away from the promises of God than those who are pulled away through dating relationships with non-Christians.

Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 6:14 that believers should not be unequally yoked to non-believers. Moses knew it was a temptation four thousand years ago, Paul knew it was a temptation 2,000 years ago, and we know it's a temptation today. We have a church with lots of young adults in it, and the temptation is to think that you are equipped and strong enough to navigate a relationship with someone who doesn't love God, but why would you risk it?

Gerald Moore was a world famous accompanist who told the story of an opera singer whose career faded into nothingness due to a relationship. Describing this painful process which unfolded before his eyes he said that this musician was, "destroyed by a man she loved deeply, by a man without an atom of music in his soul, cruel and callous, who enjoyed torturing her by telling her she was nothing."

If our greatest hope is in the saving distinctions of a loving and faithful God, then we should not risk affections of this world which treat our distinctions as nothing. In our relationships, in our wealth, and in our worship God wants us to be distinct from the world.

But because this world is filled with threats, we can often be fearful in our faithfulness. But look at what Moses says next: **Deuteronomy 7:17-22.**

Here in the literal sense, and in the New Testament in the metaphorical sense, the language of warfare is used when it comes to expanding sphere of Godly distinction in our lives. It's a battle, and there will be times where you say, "These nations are bigger than I. These sins are stronger than I." And here Moses doesn't argue that point does he?

In fact he already affirmed that back in **Deuteronomy 7:1**. The hurdles to your holiness are always going to be bigger than you, but they will never be bigger than God. God will help you. He has already set you apart, do you think that he's going to leave you now?

And I love how Moses describes the process here (vs. 22) "God will clear away these nations before you little by little. You may not make an end to them all at once." For Israel and for the believer, the rest of our life is this process of making headway in holiness. We are little by little to look less like the people of the land and more like people of the Lord.

What does this look like in your life? Remember holiness does not make you loved by God, holiness is a sign that you are loved by God. Don't we want daily to be reminded more and more of this wonderful grace? This is the confidence and concern holiness presents.

Now beginning in chapter 8 we see that Moses is no longer preparing them for the external threats in the land, but the internal threats, the threats of their own heart. And it is here where we see our second point this morning: **A holy people sets God apart as holy**.

Now this is really important. Because if we are not careful we can easily leverage holiness into legalism. You've all heard the term "holier than thou" and it's generally not meant as a compliment.

So the question is, as God is calling Israel, and as God believers in Jesus to be holy, how does this not become merely behavior modification or elevated morality?

This is why you must not only see that God sets his people apart, but you must see that God's true people also set God apart. If all we do is look at our holiness we will be prone to either anxiety or arrogance, but if we see that God himself is holy, he is set apart from us, Lord over all things, then all of our life is filled with God's gracious power and not our own self-righteous effort.

If God isn't set apart as holy in your heart, you will never fully be set apart as holy in the world.

That's what Moses now turns his attention towards: **Deuteronomy 8:1-5**.

So here Moses turns his attention to the hope of Israel's heart by looking back at their wanderings in the wilderness. For 40 years these people wandered in the desert and their clothes never wore out.

Can you imagine that? I can't keep holes out of my kid's jeans for two weeks of back-yard grass, and here God kept Israel's clothes whole for 40 years in the wilderness.

We were talking in my community group about this text and one of the guys in it used to be in the military. He talked about how wild it is that their feet never swelled. He knew from experience that marching around through tough terrain even for a little while causes your feet to swell and become painful. But here no swelling.

If we could buy those clothes or purchase those shoes wouldn't we do it? There would be lines for days to purchase products with such reliability. But this is Moses' point, you can't buy this out of your own wealth, because it's not a product. It's a person. It was their God who delivered them, and each and every one of us can have that God through faith.

Look at how he put it: **Deuteronomy 8:3-5.**

They didn't know, you didn't know, but now you know you live by every word of this holy and faithful God. All of their life in the wilderness was meant to test and to discipline. He wanted them to see that just as a father trains his child, just as a trainer disciplines an athlete, God wants to discipline our hearts for faithful endurance. He wanted them to know what patterns proved ineffective and what patterns always worked. Looking back don't you see that God was always faithful?

If you have been saved by Jesus Christ, can't you look back and see God's faithfulness? Looking at the cross you see your own wilderness. You see that your sin demanded death, but a death that Jesus paid for you. Just based off what has happened, shouldn't Jesus be distinct in your heart over and above the products or prizes of this world?

Moses looked back at God's faithfulness, but now he is going to look forward to God's continued faithfulness and the challenge that this too will bring to God's people: **Deuteronomy 8:6-20.**

You see it's easy to see God as the salvation you so desperately need when things are broken, but the narrative of scripture is that it's often harder to see him when things are fixed.

Our fickle hearts so quickly forget God's love and his might. And when that happens God loses his holy distinction. He no longer gets set apart in our hearts. But this is why we must learn to do as Peter says in **1 Peter 3:15**. The call is to honor Jesus as holy, for him to be set apart in your affection.

Now if we are not careful, we can see a lack of heartfelt distinction towards God as something which makes God pitiable. Like a dog whose owner has emotionally moved on. But God is not to be pitied in moments like this. We are.

Did you see what Moses said: **Deuteronomy 8:19-20**. When God fails to be seen as holy it is we who are in trouble not God.

So how can we make sure that in our deserts or in our delights do not forget the grace of God? Peter answered that for us. The hope of holiness is in a constant awareness of the hope of salvation. Look again: **1 Peter 3:15**.

If we are to constantly see Jesus as holy, if we are constantly to pass the external and the internal tests of life, then we must learn to be amazed at hope. Not hope in general. Not hope for Israel. Not hope for the church. Hope for you. The reason for the hope that you have.

Look again at this language of hope Moses uses: **Deuteronomy 7:6-9.**

What hope! God saved us because he loved us. He sent his son for us to make us holy because he desired to treasure us. He overcame the problems in your heart because he chose you for his own joy. And in the face of all the trials you might encounter, you have no hope without this hope.

The only way into this hope is to see in clarity God's salvation for you in Jesus Christ. If you have never seen that before, I pray that God might open your eyes to see that now. That judgment looms over all who reject God, but grace to those who respond with love to God's mercy.

For those who are believers, I pray God continues to set us apart by setting himself apart in our own hearts. I'm sure each of us has some scent, some food, or some item that when we encounter it provides a powerful sense of nostalgia. It is set apart from everything else and with it comes all the context of those memories. Does the smell of the gospel have that kind of sway over you? Reminding you regardless of what comes in your life, that it was God who got you this far, and it is his wonderful gospel which will continue to get you through life's battles.