

Part 8: True Worship

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December 29, 2019

We are back in the book of Deuteronomy just in time for New Year, and I think the passages we are going to spend the next month in are fitting considering the reset that January normally brings us.

For the first eleven chapters of Deuteronomy Moses has been reminding God's people of his wonderful and gracious will to save, but also unpacking for them a summary of how God's people should live in light of his salvation, and specifically in light of their life in the Promised Land.

As Moses is preaching this sermon the people of God are on the plains of Moab waiting to cross over into the Land of God's promise. And I imagine that for some of them, they might have the same zeal or anxiety you have for the New Year. The Promised Land was a place where God's people would finally rest in the fullness of God's promise: they would be God's people, living in God's place, in and under God's direct rule and presence.

So what does life look like when we finally get there? For us it might be, how can I balance my budget? How can I get my degree? How can I get better at blank?

We are starting a Bible reading plan this year, and you will note that none of those plans start with Deuteronomy 12-26. That's because if you were to pick up your Bible and read those chapters you might simply find them to be a list of odd and foreign laws.

But it is actually in these laws, especially when we look back in light of the gospel of Jesus, that we see God's grace. Just as you want to practically develop certain areas of your life, God's salvation is meant to practically change all of our life. This includes as we will see Israel's diet, healthcare, social justice, generosity, legal systems and power structures.

And the fact that God even cares about these issues is a sign of his wonderful grace. But today, Moses begins these specific applications for God's people with one of the biggest words in religion: worship. God cares about your worship.

This past September, Union Seminary hosted a chapel and at that chapel said this: "Today in chapel, we confessed to plants. Together, we held our grief, joy, regret, hope, guilt and sorrow in prayer; offering them to the beings who sustain us but whose gift we too often fail to honor. What do you confess to the plants in your life?"

As silly as this sounds, people, confessing Christian people, really did this. There were really sincere. They did it in a chapel. There was music. It was to anyone who was there, an act of worship. But is this true worship?

As you pick up Bible reading plans this year you might need to ask yourself the same question. And it is this question, and it's practice in the life of God's people which Moses wants us to understand better today.

Moses is going to outline for Israel four principles of true worship. What we are going to see this morning is that: **True worship displaces false worship, pleases God, builds up others, and offers our finest.**

So with that said, let's read our first portion of Moses' message today: **Deuteronomy 12:1-7.**

So it is here where we begin to see our first picture of worship: **True Worship displaces false worship.**

Here Moses points out over the land, and motions to all these false temples, pillars, altars and gods, and says, "Your worship, people of God, cannot look like that worship. You must not worship God in this way."

Yes, it is true people of God had made it Promised Land. But just because God grace has carried them there didn't mean their journey was over. Despite finally getting to the Land, Moses reminds them that this is only the beginning of their obedient worship.

Did you see that? In the first verse he reminds them that they are to obey and worship God, "all the days you live on the earth."

Think of it this way. This spring, some 400 or so college football players will be drafted by an NFL team. And the moment that their name is called, they are no longer a college football player, they are legally declared to be a player in the National Football League. But this isn't the end right?

It's only the beginning. While they have been converted in title and given access to world class trainers, nutritionists and workout facilities, there is still a conversion yet to be made. There is more change to be had. If you have been saved by the gospel of Jesus Christ, you have been declared new in him yet, there is still work to be had and growth to be made, and all of it is still fueled by grace.

Now if you remember back in Deuteronomy 4, Moses reminded the people of God of the terrible time in the wilderness when they turned aside and worshipped the Ba'al of Peor. The Ba'al was the false god of the Canaanites.

So outside the land, the people knew that there was an ever present danger of idolatry. But here Moses is pointing out to them that just because you are in the Land, it does not mean that the temptations to worship false idols will be removed.

And here Moses commissions the whole of Israel to actively, and even violently, wield their sledgehammers on these places of religious influence. You see what's interesting here, is that even in this land which is occupied by seven different people groups, Moses assumes that worship is happening.

Moses assumes that people worship. It's just that some people worship things which can be destroyed by human hands, and other people worship the hands which created the world.

Your whole life is a life of worship. Moses just wants you to worship the only God who is actually worthy of it.

Sin preys on our worship. It says come and offer your time, your wealth and your affection here and you will get everything you want. Because of that, Moses says you should make every effort to get rid of physical places which might make temptation and distraction all the more real.

If you are a believer, God has not in the New Testament called us to go and violently oppose the idols of our day. But he does call us to be equally as violent towards the sin in our hearts. Consider Jesus' words: **Matthew 5:29-30**. Or Paul in **Colossians 3:5**.

Worship is not only a response to what is beautiful and true, but it is a commitment to put away the lesser and dangerous things which attempt to tap our exclusive affection for God. And what I love about this passage is that it is a corporate effort.

This New Year, here in our church, we have an obligation to help each other by waging war against the temptations to give our lives and our worship to things which are not God. We might not have temples and pillars, but each of us can think of ways in which our lives worship at the altar of sex, schedules, sports, family or money.

So when you think of threats to your own heart, what are some things this year that need to go? Yes, Moses does call Israel to seek out a specific place, a place which we will talk about in a bit. But responding to God in worship is not only the active seeking of him, but the active process of putting sin to death.

Worship is not only elated times of joyful singing, it is also the quiet and painful moments of wrenching false temples out of our own hearts. If you assess your own life, are there things which exhibit the same amount of dedication and control over your spending, your time and your affection as the gospel does? If so, destroy those temples, or you will be at risk of destruction. True worship displaces what is false.

Our next two pictures of true worship come from the same text: **Deuteronomy 12:8-14**

The first thing we see in this text is this: **True Worship pleases God.**

It is a dangerous and tricky place to say to someone: don't worship God like that. We feel that if we mean it, and if we think godly thoughts while doing it, anything can be worship. And that's true. All our life is motivated by worship. But is it true worship, worship of the God who saves us from our sins through Jesus Christ?

In the face of these false temples, the average Israelite will be forced to make a decision of if they want to worship Yahweh by offering their best sacrifices, or if they would like to worship Yahweh as the Canaanites worship their gods, by sleeping with a prostitute. Do we need to confess sin to God or can we just confess our sin to plants?

And here Moses makes it clear: worship is not a free for all of personal preference. Moses says you should not do whatever is right in your own eye, instead you should do all that I command you.

You see it's very easy to make worship only about one's self. It becomes less about God and more about us. We want to feel a certain way. We want a certain kind of experience. We want to be the center of it.

Now don't forget that these Israelites were to experience real rejoicing. But what was at the center of their joy? We saw the center of their worship in **Deuteronomy 12:4-5**. The center of worship is God and his presence. The center of true worship isn't your presence, it's God's presence. For us today it is through Jesus' work on the cross where we access God's presence.

Meaning it is the gospel and not lights, songs, or atmospheres which produce worship.

This sounds kind of harsh, but Moses and God give grace to people who are in the midst of figuring this out. We all start here. And Moses says, "You've done that here, but as you grow and enter into the land you need to put away this idea that worship is about your preference and what you see to be right."

In fact look at the contrast later in the chapter: **Deuteronomy 12:25, 28**. Todd Miles made this point when he preached here earlier this year, but Moses made the point far before Todd did. When we assess the corporate worship services of this church or churches we visit, we so quickly think: Did I enjoy that? But the real question isn't did I enjoy it. The real question is did God enjoy it?

We aren't the center of worship. God is. Which is why Moses emphasizes the substance of our worship. It's mostly sacrifices. Some to meet the qualifications of the law, some out of raw gratitude, and some freely offered because you are so grateful for what this God has done in your life.

Worship begins with what God has done for us, and then drives forward as it seeks to make much of what God has done.

But not only is worship a personal response to what God has done, but we also see that **True Worship Builds Up Others**.

But there is another aspect of the community of worship here. Look back at **Deuteronomy 12:12**. Now this might seem like a verse that we just breeze over, but it really is important here. True worship, especially in a corporate setting like the nation of Israel or a New Testament church, isn't simply a "you and God" experience. It has deeply corporate and communal effects.

In Hindu culture there is a caste of people called the Dalit; meaning the "untouchables." Those are people whom the gods have designated for a life of labor. They are not to be touched, not to be treated as other humans, and not given any admittance to religious functions.

Yet here we see in contrast to this, and in contrast to the idea that Christianity is simply a "western religion," that the worship of the true God was always a place of radical diversity by God's grace.

Women, children, servants, all were welcome to worship God. In fact, the corporate worship of Israel was to be prioritized over the personal preference of the individual's eye.

This is something carried over in the New Testament church as well. When we think of worship in the modern church, we generally only think in terms of individual expression. But the New Testament shows that it is corporate worship which is uniquely privileged worship.

Look at how Paul emphasizes this issue to the church in Corinth who were participating in all kinds of worship, most of which Paul opposed: **1 Corinthians 10:23-24**. Paul says to the church in Corinth that

there is much liberty in how you worship God, but your corporate worship, your worship together, out to build up others and not just yourself.

He then goes on to talk about tongues. When Paul talks about speaking in tongues he talks about either speaking some private prayer language, or speaking miraculously in a different language by the power of the Holy Spirit. And at that time people in the church were speaking in tongues constantly in the weekly gathering but look at what Paul says: **1 Corinthians 14:1-4, 18-19.**

Your worship here in this church is so important because whether you know it or not, your worship builds up my worship. And my worship builds up your worship.

There are few things which shape the tone of our Sunday mornings than this corporate nature of worship. We worship with the lights on because it's not just you worshipping. This isn't hundreds of individuals worshipping on their own. One of the constant battles Jonny and our other sound volunteers wrestle with is trying to make sure we can hear the congregation singing because we want to be encouraged by the voices of others. This is as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:27 us being individual members of the corporate body of Christ. We worship together and are better for it.

One of the privileges of being your pastor is that I know a lot of the hardships that many of you are going through. And there are Sunday's where I am wrestling with worship in my own heart and I look at and I see some of you signing, or praying, or playing an instrument, or serving in children's ministry and I am so encouraged in my own heart. That despite your struggles, Jesus is still worth it to you, and despite my troubles I can remind myself of the same.

Corporate worship as the church matters to you and to others. This year as you consider your calendar and weekends away, do not neglect the corporate aspect of your worship and the influence it has both on you and on others.

Moses has now shown that we ought not worship God as the other nations do, he has shown we ought not worship God according to our own whims, and now he shows us that we ought not worship God in cheap ways.

This is where he shows that **True Worship Offers Our Finest.**

Now in this passage we are going to read a lot about eating meat, and kinds of meat and where you eat that meat. And it might be an odd thing for us to consider without the help of some background.

So here is some context. As the people of Israel were wandering in the desert, they were free to eat wild game that they caught so long as it was approved game. But if they wanted to eat domestic animals like cows or sheep, those animals had to be subjected to the sacrificial system at the central place of worship.

That central place of worship was the tabernacle. Which was a mobile tent which God graciously prescribed to Israel, and God dwelt in that tabernacle. The nice thing about this was that as Israel was wandering in the wilderness, everyone was near to the tabernacle. It went with them. So if you wanted to eat meat, all you had to do was go to the middle of camp and present your meat, and then you'd be on your way.

But what we've seen three times now in Deuteronomy 12 is that God is going to soon designate one place as the special place. Upon one place God will put his name and it is to that place that you will bring your sacrifices.

This presents a small problem which displays God's wonderful kindness. As the people settle in the Promised Land, and as God fulfills his promise to expand their borders, there would be an issue of distance. While God had told his people that they could eat any wild game, if God's people wanted to eat domestic animals, they would have to pack up their family, travel a long distance to this new place, and eat there.

But look at what God is going to do for them: **Deuteronomy 12:15-21**.

So here we continue to see the corporate nature of God's worship, but we also see this wonderful concession that God has given to the people. God says that if you are too far removed from the place, then you may eat meat as you see fit. You no longer have to submit all your domestic meat to central place of worship.

How kind is this God? You see the truth is that like this meat, everything that we enjoy in this world was made to be offered back to God. Look at how Paul talks of this in **Colossians 1:16**. All of creation is for God, but in common ways God has allowed us to enjoy specific things apart from him.

Why can believers and non-believers enjoy BBQ? Sunsets? Mountains? Because God has graciously given it to us in a common grace. God stands behind it, but he has out of his immense mercy, freely given it to people in general.

But there is a danger both in our consumption of common grace and in Israel's new permission to eat meat freely. Look at this: **Deuteronomy 12:26-28**.

What's the danger in all of this? Here it is. Imagine you are an Israelite that has had a good week of eating. You've had some great mutton chops, and maybe a tasty brisket, and you've done all of that from the confines of your own back yard. But now let's say you have this one cow left.

It's a first born cow. And you know that all first-born produce qualify as a "holy thing" it is due as an act of worship for you to pack up and travel to the place and sacrifice and eat in accordance to God's law. But that place is a solid two day's journey from where you are. So you look around and you say, "Well, I've been able to eat everything else here...why don't I just sacrifice this right here and maybe say a little extra prayer over it. Do I really have to go all the way to the place that God chose?"

Yes, says Moses. God has given you so much common grace to enjoy, but sometimes special worship is costly worship. The quality of our worship matters. Moses knows that people will be tempted, as we see all throughout scripture to cut corners, to provide to God things and efforts which are not the best. But if you have been saved by such a God as this these holy things are a due and right act of worship.

If we were to assess the quality of our worship, would we find any extraordinary effort in our worship of God? Or would the offering of our "holy things" look just as ordinary as any other backyard BBQ?

I'm convicted of this when it comes to my consumption of sports. Sports are wonderful things which God gave us, but sometimes I give my best to sports and not to God. There are many times where I want

to watch a specific game and I know I don't want to be interrupted. So prior to the game I tell Sarah, "I'm about to watch the game, is there anything I can do for you before I sit down?"

But the truth is, I rarely do that when it comes to my quiet time or my prayer life. But true worship uses out best, not what's left.

Now maybe at this point in the message, you've gone from worship as being something you enjoy to something you're less sure about. You're telling me worship involves killing sin? Worship isn't about me? Worship seeks to build others up? Worship demands my best? This seems burdensome.

But let's not forget, all worship is a response to an object of worth.

Make no mistake. It is costly to go to God's place. It was costly for the Israelites. Six times Moses tells God's people that they need to go to God's chosen place. He doesn't outright tell them where the place is, but in that place God would set his name. In that place God would dwell with his people. In that place God would take ordinary animals and accept them as spiritual acts of worship. Twice he says that if you can make it to that place, it will go well with you and with your children. Three more times he says if you can make it to that place you will rejoice before God, in all that you do, you and everyone who comes with you.

But you've got to go. But what we will see is that Israel would wrestle with this. They would worship God in their own way, they would mix with the idols they didn't destroy. Even as the Temple was build and as Jerusalem was established as the place which God chose there was still confusion and chaos.

This endured for a thousand years. This dilemma of worship permeated the mind of a young Samaritan woman in the New Testament as she spoke this to a Jewish man she had never met: **John 4:19-26**.

You see in Jesus, God's place came to us. In Jesus God, God established his name forever. In Jesus, God accepted Jesus' spotless sacrifice so that those who believe in him might be made holy.

In Jesus the script was flipped. In Jesus we no longer come to God and bring animals as a sacrificial act of worship. In Jesus, we have been brought to God and we ourselves have been made into a sacrifice of worship.

Romans 12:1-2.

Worship is still hard. It is hard to tear down the competing altars of sin in our lives. It's hard to worship with other broken people and to submit our desires to the eyes of God instead of the eyes of self. It's hard to offer the quality of worship that God deserves. But because Jesus has saved us from our sin, we are able to do all of these costly things.

Because of Jesus we can truly worship God with all of our lives.