

Living Worship

We are back in our series from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, a series we are calling *God in the Midst*.

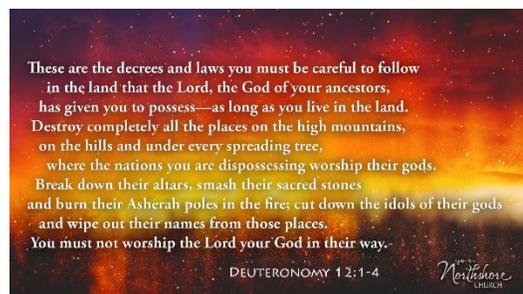
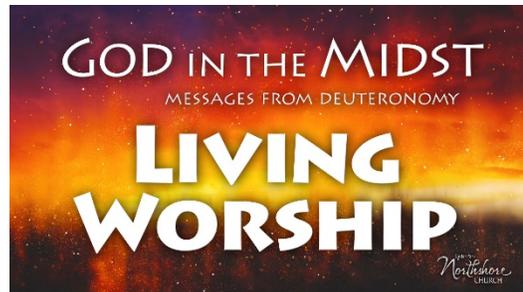
While we have the 34 chapters in Deuteronomy broken down into nearly twenty parts for the purpose of our series. We could think of the Book of Deuteronomy as one sermon... one **long** sermon, from Moses to the people he led for over forty years. Before he released the People of God to cross the Jordan River and occupy the home that God promised, Moses gave these words in the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses wanted the people to grasp what it meant to be a People with *God in the midst*.

Today we are looking to chapters 12, 13, and 14. These chapters, and many chapters that follow, are introduced by the first verse of chapter 12:

These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess—as long as you live in the land.¹

The chapters and verses that follow get pretty specific about these decrees and laws.

Let's just admit it: *It can get a bit tedious*. If you are a Bible reader like me, you might find some of detail of it all a bit boring. For a number of years now I have kept myself on a routine of reading the Bible through, cover to cover, each year. A glorious thing happened last week as the Bible-reading plan I'm using this year finally got me into the New Testament. Is it okay that I admit, out loud, that I usually prefer the New Testament for my daily Bible reading?



¹ The New International Version. (2011). (Dt 12:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

There is some of that tedious detail in Deuteronomy; I intend to provide a more *big-picture* view... and that big picture view starts with this: these decrees and laws don't **save** anyone. I think we often err when we think of the Good News of the New Testament replacing the Old... as if Jesus and the Apostle Paul invented grace. Do we ever let ourselves think that way... that God's plan A was all of the law stuff, but since God's people couldn't hack it He came up with a Plan B.

That is simply not the case; it has always been grace. It has always been God's mercy and love behind every action, every decree, and every law. All of this is not so that people could find a way into God's favor; all of this is because of God's favor. These laws and rules were not a way to earn God's love, they were given because of God's love, mercy, and grace.

What follows in these verses and chapters were not regulations for life and worship so that they could find God's favor; they were regulations for life and worship **because** they had God's favor. They were people with *God in the midst*, and this was a way they should respond and live with God in their midst.

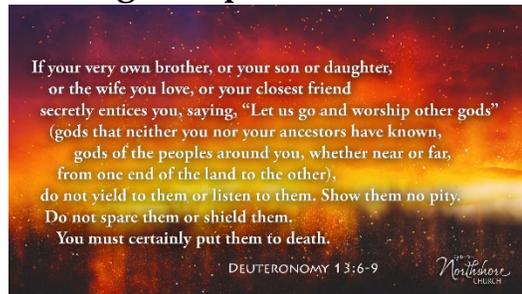
God's grace and mercy and love were before any of these laws and decrees... so of course this wasn't some sort of failed plan-A, it was merely God's plan that begins by His grace, ends by His grace, and demonstrates His grace all the way through.

I think that if we can grasp that truth, then even the detailed specifics of these decrees and laws will have real meaning to us.

The verses that follow in chapter 12 are about finding a special place to worship. The *traveling Tabernacle* and altars would give way to stationary **Temple** and altars in the land that God promised. But more than that, chapter 12 calls, again, for clear, single-hearted devotion to the One True God. There is a call to neither worship the so-called gods in the land, nor worship the One True God in the *ways* of those in the land.

That call to singular devotion to God persists through chapter 13. Hear these words from the heart of chapter 13:

⁶ If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, “Let us go and worship other gods” (gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, ⁷ gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), ⁸ do not yield to them or listen to them. Show them no pity. Do not spare them or shield them. ⁹ You must certainly put them to death.²



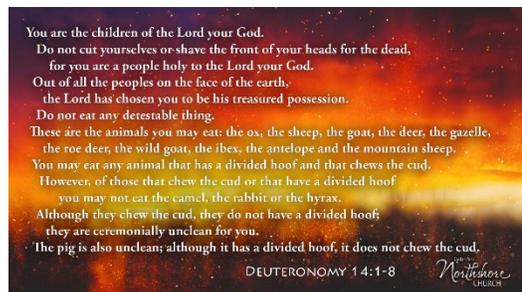
The danger of God’s People being led away to other so-called gods was so real, the decrees were presented in these most **personal** and **harsh** ways.

I suppose that could seem *barbaric* or *fanatical*; it **would** be in our present context. But in that context, the main point was not about the *death penalty* for idolatry... but rather, the main point is about **loyalty**. God’s people formed into this nation of the this purpose, a people with God in the midst, were called to unswerving loyalty to God... even when that loyalty was challenged by those closest to them.

Chapter 14 gets into matters of everyday life. It begins by saying:

You are the children of the LORD your God.³

With that declaration we are reminded of the love and care committed by the Father, as well as the duty of children to honor and obey.



This business of not cutting oneself or *shaving for the dead* has to do with religious fertility and mourning rituals practiced by the Canaanites; it was simply another call to religious purity... for

Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession.⁴

With verse 3, we get into what we might call the *kosher laws* today.

² The New International Version. (2011). (Dt 13:6–9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ The New International Version. (2011). (Dt 14:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Dt 14:2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud.⁵

We can be glad that these laws were clearly and specifically set aside in the New Testament. I don't care about eating camel or owl or bat... but I do like that non-cud-chewing pig... and judging by the way that giant pan of bacon and sausage disappeared at yesterday's men's breakfast, I am not alone in my admiration of the pig.

There are those that have asserted that these kosher laws have a lot to do with being healthy, that these kosher meats are just better for human consumption, especially in those ancient contexts. There might be something to that... but I'm confident that is **not** the **main** point.

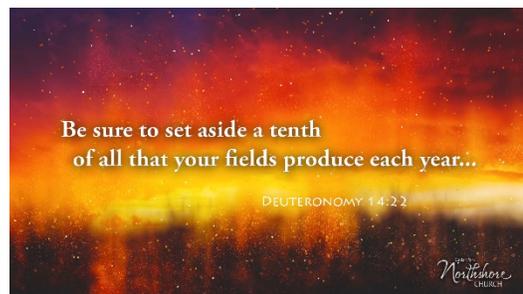
The main point is that worship was (and is) not merely a matter of a special moment on a special day, or even a devotional moment each day... no, worship was intended to mark every moment of everyday, right down to each and every meal. Keeping these kosher laws served to be a constant reminder that God had called a people together for a special purpose. There was no way to forget it if every meal was marked by these special acts of worship.

Chapter 14 ends calling the people of God to worship with their livelihood.

²² Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.⁶

Not merely an annual, quarterly, or even a monthly payment like a tax... but a tithe, a routine portion set aside as holy to the Lord. Some was set aside for worship, other parts set aside for the Levites, the clergy of the day who saw to the work of worship (I think I saw on the Internet that October is Levite appreciation month).

A people with God in the midst could not, must not, neglect worshiping God with a portion of their livelihood.



⁵ The New International Version. (2011). (Dt 14:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Dt 14:22). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Again, none of this was to earn God's favor; all of this was preceded by God's grace, mercy, and love. Whether it was a suitable *place* for worship, or *exclusivity* of worship, or dietary laws, or tithing... this was a response to God's grace, mercy and love, not some misguided way to somehow earn it or qualify for it.

Here's another way to put it: we want to give God ***the home field advantage***.

We should have a unique understanding of the home field advantage here in Seattle.

Seahawks fans might be a bit worried about this afternoon's game since it is not at our home field. We won last Sunday night... but that was here at Century Link, not like today in Los Angeles. The stats reveal that the Seahawks consistently have one of the very top home field advantages... due in some part to the engineering of the facility so that it is so loud, but due mostly to the loyalty and exuberance of the 12s, the Seahawks fans. It truly gives our team an edge. Our team performs significantly better with the home field advantage.

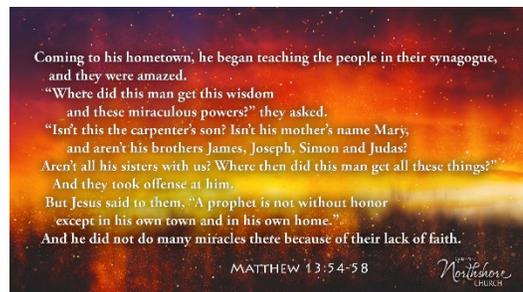
But sometimes being in our hometown, among family or those most familiar to us, backfires. Sometimes, as the saying goes, *familiarity breeds contempt*.

Here's an account from the life of Jesus as it is recorded in Matthew 13.

⁵⁴ Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed.

Well, of course they were amazed, it was Jesus! This is starting out the way we might expect. Jesus, the Word of God *in the flesh* teaching the Word of God. I'm doing my best here, but I never expect anyone to be amazed. But of course we would be amazed by the teaching of Jesus in this remarkable way; so far this sounds about right.

"Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. ⁵⁵ "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?" ⁵⁶ Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" ⁵⁷ And they took offense at him.



Now, after reading a bit more, we see that their amazement wasn't the kind of amazement that we might expect. They were not amazed by the content; they were amazed that this plain one they knew from boyhood, this one who was so common (having siblings among the crowd), would dare be such a big deal. The implied question was: "Jesus, who do you think you are?"

But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home."

⁵⁸ And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith. ⁷

Notice that it does not say that he **could not** do miracles because of their lack of faith.

There are those who profess that **our faith** is what does the miracle. That if we have great faith, we can do the miraculous... and if our faith is puny, then the miracle will not come. It is as if God is somehow aided by our great faith, or limited by our lack of faith.

That is ridiculous. God is god. He doesn't need anything from us to do whatever He wills, nor can we stand in His way.

Jesus did not do many miracles there, not because He could not; apparently He did do *some*... just not *many*. Why? Because what would be the point?

What is the point of any miracle? In most every case the substance of the miracle is only temporary anyway. Everyone that Jesus healed, or even raised from the dead, got sick and died eventually. The miracles didn't last. The only thing that lasts is **faith**. Miracles are for building, or growing, our faith. If there is no faith to start with, then what is the point?

We want God to have the home field advantage.

We want a faith-filled atmosphere for the miraculous.



⁷ The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 13:54–58). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

We accomplish that in many of the same ways that ancient Israel did *in and following* the days of Deuteronomy.

- We worship the One True God
- We live lives of worship, every day
- We set aside sin, repenting of our wrongdoing and striving to live pure and holy lives
- We acknowledge that God is God, not insisting on Him conforming to the way we might like things, but expecting Him to go about His work His way

And we have the Holy Spirit working in and through the Church.

- Drawing people to Jesus
- Confirming the truth of His Word in our hearts
- Working through the gifts of the Spirit

Sometimes we get that right, and sometimes we get that wrong. We blew it last week; or more accurately *I blew it*. Sometimes giving God *the home field advantage* is simply a practical matter that involves our preparation, leadership, and even technology.

Some of you may have been aware that during our time of singing last Sunday, in between songs and after a moment of prayer, there was a prophetic word from God... but we ran right over it with the next song. Most couldn't hear on the platform, and I wasn't present (my body was here; I was just preoccupied).

So what do we do when we blow it like that? We apologize, learn from our mistakes, and move forward. I had one accuse me of "grieving the Spirit" with our mistake (I checked, I haven't found *Ichabod* written above any of our doors). I'm confident that the Holy Spirit tolerates our honest mistakes. We, of course, desire the Holy Spirit's work in and through all of our work at Northshore. We make mistakes along the way. I actually think the Holy Spirit delights in our honest mistakes as long as we are learning from them.

We've reserved some time here at the end to give *God the home field advantage*. Perhaps there is faith here that can grow through the miraculous. So we are going to take a few minutes and pray.

Perhaps you came today hoping that someone would be ready to pray with you, whether that is for healing, or answers, or comfort... we have faith to pray.

Perhaps you are finding yourself at a special moment of faith. Today is a day to believe, and we would be glad to join you in prayer.