

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Seventh Sunday After Trinity, August 4, 2019

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 279, 281:1-2, 278, 409, 401.

Lessons: Numbers 25:1-9, Romans 3:19-24, John 14:1-6.

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 30:15-18

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear Friends in Christ our Redeemer:

Fifteen hundred years before Jesus was born, the Lord called Moses up to Mount Sinai to give the Ten Commandments and other laws to Israel. It was at this time, when Israel had left Egypt and had begun their journey through the wilderness, that God established a covenant with them. He told them: ***“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*** Ex. 19:5.6 (NIV)

Forty years later, as Israel was about to enter the promised land of Canaan, this covenant was renewed. With many words just before his death, Moses earnestly spoke to the people of Israel. He told of the wonderful blessings they would have if they obeyed the Lord, and of the terrible disaster that would come upon them if they disobeyed the Lord.

In what Moses spoke to the Israelites, we have something most appropriate for us to hear. Moses told Israel: ***“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.”*** So we today want to consider these words as our theme:

“LIFE AND PROSPERITY” or “DEATH AND DESTRUCTION”

We hear:

- 1. A warning against turning away from the Lord and being disobedient; and,**
- 2. An exhortation to love the Lord, walk in His ways, and keep His commandments.**

The warning against turning away from the Lord had been given to Israel many times. But they were a rebellious people. They turned away from the Lord and worshiped the golden calf right after they had promised to keep God’s Law. They were so stubborn and rebellious that the Lord had them wander in the desert for forty years. During this time, every Israelite of those that left Egypt except Joshua and Caleb, died in the desert. Only their children under the age of 20 ever entered the promised land.

Yet, the Lord was very patient with them and continued to warn and exhort them. We hear in our text one of those warnings: ***“If your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.”*** This is the preaching of the Law of God. He warns against turning away from Him and worshiping other gods and he threatens certain destruction if His Law is disobeyed.

An example of Israel’s disobedience and the Lord’s punishment is given in the Book of Numbers telling of what happened to the Israelites with the heathen of Moab: ***“the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD’s anger burned against them.”*** Numbers 25:1-3 (NIV) The Lord commanded that all these people who had sinned with the Moabites should be killed, and there were 24,000 of them that were killed in a plague the Lord sent.

Israel was disobedient again and again. When they finally came into Canaan, the Lord wanted them to be absolutely separate from the heathen idol worshipers. He commanded them: ***“Drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. ... But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you live. And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them.”*** Numb. 33:52, 55-56. All went well at first as the people obeyed the Lord’s commands. But after Joshua’s death the people fell away from the Lord. ***“Another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals.”*** Judges 2:10-11

This was the beginning of the end, and though many years passed, the Lord did finally do what he says in our text: ***“I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.”*** So it happened that 10 tribes were permanently exiled in Assyria and 2 tribes spent 70 years in captivity. When the Savior was born, what was left of Israel was ruled over by the Romans. In the year 70 A.D., Jerusalem was completely destroyed and the Jews were scattered all over the earth, because of their most serious disobedience – their rejection of the promised Messiah Jesus Christ.

The history of Israel is a sad history because of their disobedience. Their example is one we should not fail to heed as a warning. The Book of Hebrews says: ***“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”*** Hebrews 3:12-13 Such a warning is truly needed in our day. Everywhere we see the evidence of disobedience to God’s Law. Daily we hear about man’s blatant disregard for what God has commanded in His Law. There is an attitude expressed in these words: “Who cares what God says!”

What we need to do is review the Ten Commandments for ourselves. When we think of the First Commandment, we should not just think of heathen nations worshiping other gods. Let us ask ourselves what we allow to interfere with worshiping God. What do we allow to come first, before reading the bible, before going to worship? Similar questions about the other commandments would reveal the misuse of God’s name by cursing, by failing to pray. It would reveal a sad neglect of God’s Word, especially in the home. It would reveal disobedience to father and mother and others over us in the Lord. It would reveal a hatred in thought, word and deed of our fellowman, sexual immorality of all kinds, a lack of love for our marriage partner, cheating and stealing, vicious slander to ruin reputations, and covetousness, that is, a sinful desire to have what God has forbidden.

Let us examine ourselves according to God’s Law, and then acknowledge that we have sinned in how we think, in what we say and what we do. Then let us say with David: ***“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”*** Ps. 51:1-2 For without the forgiveness of sins for Jesus’ sake, we will surely perish in hell for our disobedience.

Our text also contains an exhortation to love the Lord, walk in His ways, and keep His commandments.

2.

Moses told Israel: ***“I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.”*** The Lord promised His blessings to Israel many times with details to make them happy. He told them: ***“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.”*** Lev. 26:3-5. What more could they want than that?

The Lord has promised His blessings to us too. We have learned in the Conclusion to the Commandments in the Catechism these words: “He promises grace and every blessing to all that keep these commandments. Therefore we should also love and trust in Him, and willingly do according to His commandments.” There are many other promises of God’s blessings to those who love the Lord and obey His

commands. The Book of Proverbs says: ***“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.”*** 3:1-2 It also says: ***“He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.”*** Proverbs 2:7-8 (NIV)

Not only earthly blessings, but eternal life could be had if the Law of God was kept perfectly. Paul wrote to the Romans: ***“Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’”*** Romans 10:5 (NIV) But, who can keep the Law perfectly? The answer is: No one! ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** Rom. 3:23 For that reason the Bible says: ***“No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.”*** Rom. 3:20 Instead, the very opposite is the result of trying to earn righteousness by the Law. We are condemned because we cannot meet the demands of the holy God. His law only makes us conscious of our sins. By the law, Paul says, ***“every mouth (is) silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.”*** Romans 3:19 And God’s verdict is: ***“The wages of sin is death.”*** Rom. 6:23

That’s why we need a Savior to redeem us. And redeem us He did - perfectly and completely! He was, as Paul writes, ***“Born under law, to redeem those under law.”*** Gal. 4:4.5 Jesus told His disciples: ***“The world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”*** John 14:31 That included not only perfect obedience to all the commandments of God in every detail, but also the obedience that led Him to the cross of Calvary. He said: ***“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life - only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*** John 10:17-18 Paul says of this perfect obedience of Christ: ***“Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”*** Rom. 5:19 Christ’s obedience is our salvation. In this way we are accounted as holy and righteous in God’s sight. Only in this way, despite our many sins, is it possible for the Gospel to declare: ***“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*** Rom. 8:1 And this precious promise is given: ***“The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** Rom. 6:23

When the Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts through the precious Gospel, then we will want to live in obedience to the Lord’s Word and thus show our love for Him. This we are exhorted to do when Paul writes: ***“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”*** 2 Cor. 7:1 Paul is more specific in his letter to the Ephesians: ***“Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. ... Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ... Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ... Do not be drunk on wine ... Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. ... Children, obey your parents in the lord, for this is right.”*** Ephesians 5 and 6.

May the Lord by the power of the Gospel in word and sacrament help us to amend our sinful lives and live to his honor and glory. Amen.

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