

Deuteronomy 6:1-12 [Good News Translation] – Love the Lord your God

Setting the Scene

Before we look at this passage, I want to set the scene for you. To do so I want you to note what is said in the last verse that was read and then in the first. Verse 12 reads, "Make certain that you do not forget the LORD who rescued you from Egypt, where you were slaves." Verse 1 reads, "These are all the laws that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you. Obey them in the land that you are about to enter and occupy." These two verses provide the book-ends to the story that provides the context for our reading today. The Israelites had been rescued from slavery in Egypt and were now about to enter the Promised Land. Let me remind you of the story – their story.

God had made a covenant with Abraham, promising to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan. God promised to bless him and make him a blessing to all nations.

Centuries later, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. They were forced to build monuments to the glory of Egypt and its Pharaohs and were treated cruelly if they sought any respite from their labour. But, we are told, God remembered his promises to Abraham and came down to rescue them. God had broken Pharaoh's power and had demonstrated that he, the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the living God while the gods of Egypt were powerless idols. And God told Moses that the guarantee or proof that he would bring his people into the rich and fertile land he had promised them would be that he would bring them to Mount Sinai and he would meet with them there (see Exodus 3:8-12).

So God had rescued his people. He had parted the waters of the Red Sea so that the Israelites could cross over but had caused the waters to roll back, drowning the Egyptian army. He describes how he brought his people safely to Sinai, "I carried you as an eagle carries her young on her wings, and brought you here to me" (Exodus 19:4). Now, as God descended in glory on that mountain, his covenant promises made to Abraham were renewed with Israel as he gave them his law to through Moses – giving them his instructions on how he would have them live.

And in the passage we read today, God's people about to enter the Promised Land. But they had been here before. Many years earlier they had been on the borders of the Promised Land and Moses had sent 12 spies, one man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, to go and scout out the land God had promised to give them. They had returned with reports of the land's fertility and abundant fruitfulness but also reported that it was occupied by fierce people who lived in heavily fortified cities. Ten out of the twelve spies said that the Israelites could not possibly take possession of such a land and the majority report was believed. The Israelites cried out in complaint against God and said that they wished they had been left in Egypt. As a result, after getting the borders of the Promised Land, God made them turn back and wander for 40 years in the wilderness.

But even in the wilderness, God looked after his people. He provided them with water from the rock. He provided them with manna – bread from heaven. When they got fed up with this "bread of angels" (Ps 78:25), God sent them quail to eat. God was overwhelmingly good towards this rebellious people.

Now they are here again, at the borders of the Promised Land. Before long they will cross the Jordan and enter the land God had promised to give them. How are they going to behave this time? Will they now enter the land and possess it or will it again end in disaster because of their lack of faith in God's promises and reluctance to obey him?

Moses knows he is soon to die. God has told him that he will not enter the Promised Land. So what words of encouragement, warning, advice and exhortation will Moses have for these people as they prepare to cross the Jordan and enter the land?

Deuteronomy records Moses' final words to the Israelites. The name "Deuteronomy" means a second giving, or repetition, of the law; Moses repeats and summarises the instruction God had given for his people Israel. Moses exhorts them to live up to the Lord's call upon their lives and to live in obedience to God in the land he is now giving them (6:1-3).

Deuteronomy 6:1-12

Deuteronomy 6:10 that were read this morning says, "Just as the Lord your God promised your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he will give you a land with large and prosperous cities which you did not build" (v.10). God has been faithful to all his promises and has been wonderfully gracious to his people. He has loved them and refused to cast them off despite their rebellion and disobedience. Now, through Moses, God calls the Israelites to respond to his wonderful love and to his amazing grace.

I want to sum up the message of these verses by using the four letters that make up the name "Lord", the name by which the God of Abraham was known to his people.

L – Love

Moses has reminded the people of God's great love and compassion towards them – his covenant love and mercy. It is a love that has laid hold upon them and will not let them go – a love that endures forever. Now Moses calls on this people to love God in return:

Israel, remember this! The Lord – and the Lord alone – is our God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (vv4-5)

They are to love him who has first loved them. They are to love him with every part of their being and with a love that shapes every part of their lives.

O – Obey

And that love is to be expressed in obedience to God's commandments – by living in the way that he calls them to live.

If they are obedient to the instruction that God has given them they will enjoy God's abundant blessings in the land he is giving them to possess:

"As long as you live, you and your descendants are to honour the Lord your God and obey all his laws that I am giving you, so that you may live in that land a long time. Listen to them, people of Israel, and obey them! Then all will go well with you, and you will become a mighty nation and live in that rich and fertile land, just as the Lord, the God of our ancestors, has promised." (6:2-3).

If, however, they are disobedient they will suffer God's discipline and judgment and may even be exiled from the good land that God is giving them. Obedience will bring blessing, but disobedience will bring judgment.

This is not salvation by works – the Israelites do not *become* God's redeemed people through their obedience. They are already redeemed; God rescued them from slavery, brought them to himself and made them his own special people because of his great love for them, undeserved love – it was all of grace. Now, as a redeemed people they are being called to love and obey the one who has first loved them.

R – Remember

The great danger is that they may forget what God has done for them. They are about to possess riches they have not worked for (6:10-11); they may be so satisfied with the gifts that they forget the giver: "be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (6:12).

That was the purpose of the great festivals God gave to his people. The Spring festival of Passover celebrated how God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. In the Autumn festival of Tabernacles the people all abandoned their houses and lived for a while in shelters made out of branches and other material. In this way they celebrated how God had provided for them during the long 40 years when they were wandering in the wilderness, living in tents.

And along with these festivals, the commandments that God had given his people were to be remembered, treasured and were to shape their daily lives:

"Never forget these commands that I am giving you today. Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and

when you are working. Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates." (6:6-9)

God's word, God's acts of salvation and his care for his people were to be reflected in a life of heartfelt remembrance, devotion and obedience to his commandments.

Declare

The danger of forgetting would increase as the years went by. The generation entering the Promised Land, and all the generations following them need to remember what God has done. So the Israelites were to declare what God had done for them, telling others of God's goodness and of his great acts of salvation and of the life he calls his people to live. In particular, they were to tell their children – to pass it on from one generation to another. The great celebrations we mentioned involved the whole family so that children would learn and be reminded of God's goodness to them as they heard the stories of what God had done. And, as we have seen, the Israelites were to talk about the Lord in their homes as his word shaped every part of their daily lives. So each generation was to tell the story of God's salvation to their children so that it will not be forgotten but will be celebrated (6:20-25). In this way God's commandments would be handed on to the generations to come:

What you have done will be praised from one generation to the next;
they will proclaim your mighty acts.
They will speak of your glory and majesty,
and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds. (Psalm 145:4-5)

The message for us

We also are a redeemed people. God has loved us and has rescued us from enslavement to self and to sin through the shed blood and risen power of the Lord Jesus Christ. We also are called to respond to the one who has first loved us with single-minded and wholehearted love expressed in devoted obedience to him: "If you love me, you will obey my commandments" (John 14:15).

When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way;
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.

We also are called to remember all that God has done for us by telling ourselves and others of his costly grace towards us in Christ and of his promise to bring us safely into the inheritance of glory that he has prepared for his people. We do this especially when we meet together to break bread and drink wine in remembrance of him. We do it also as we sing hymns and songs together, celebrating what God has done for us and giving him thanks.

But our celebration of what God has done for us is not to be confined to the time when we meet together as God's people; it is to shape every part of our lives. It is to be the frequent topic of conversations in our homes; it is to be central to our instruction of our children. And we are to make good use of the great Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter, telling the stories again to our children and grandchildren – "See what God has done for us!"

Nor is telling what God has done to be restricted to our family. We want all the world to know of the good news of God's great love for us shown in the Lord Jesus Christ. We want all the world to love him, obey him and celebrate his goodness. The future of the Christian church depends upon us telling others of what God has done. Without this, the church will dwindle and die.

Let's make sure that we do not forget God's costly love for us. Let us love him with a love that shapes the way we live day-by-day. May God's goodness frequently be the subject of our

conversation with our children and grandchildren and with our friends and neighbours. Such lives of devotion and service are lives lived under God's blessing.

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