

Words to Live by

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[0 : 0 0] let's pray. Heavenly Father thanks so much for your word the Bible and we thank you that you do speak to us through it and so Father we pray that you would help us to understand what you are saying not only to Israel but also to us and Father we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

Well in life we are often given words to live by aren't we? Words which might help us live well in the world. So on the next slide is a number of examples that you may have heard of. Dream big is you know some words people say live by never give up do your best be kind love your family.

Another one set a good example or here's one that's often you know been shared the sky is the limit. It's got love God there which is nice change it's also got give hugs away. I'm not a hugger so I'm happy for you to keep your hugs to yourself and laughter is the best medicine and on it goes.

There's a whole bunch of words to live by on that one image and people use them and live by different ones. Some actually claim that certain words save lives so on the next slide let's eat grandpa and let's eat grandpa. Correct punctuation can save a person's life. There are all sorts of words people live by. Of course as God's people we are to live by God's word but why is it just simply because we are his people? What's the rationale behind it? Why is God's word so important? Well that's the question that Moses answers for us today in chapter 4 of Deuteronomy. You see over the last couple of weeks we've seen Moses give this second generation of Israelites some history lessons haven't we?

So on the next slide is that map the first generation they're in red they came out from Egypt down to the bottom of Mount Sinai got the Ten Commandments and so on went up to the promised land but they refused to go in and so they went wandering the wilderness in the hill country which is where the red dotted line ends up. But then the second generation has grown up so they died in the wilderness and on the next slide we've got the second generation which is green this hasn't come out very well I'm sorry but the green line they traveled up the north eastern side and they went up into those countries they passed Edom, passed Moab, into the country of the Amorites and took out King Sion you might remember from last week they even went as far north as Bashan and took out the big giant Og. Do you remember him? King Og from last week. And we saw Moses' history lessons were firstly from their parents which was the first slide and then a history from their second generation's own recent history which is this slide. And the point of these history lessons was to remind Israel that God has kept his promises in the past and he's willing and able to keep them in the future. In fact he's already started to keep them he gave that land of the Amorites and Bashan from Og and so on into Israel's hands already and so he will keep the promise to give them the land of Canaan on the other side of the Jordan River. And so the big application for them and for us is to trust God even when it's hard even when things are overwhelming. And this was especially important for this second generation who were to take the land on the other side the left side of the Jordan River there. And that's the story so far. But once they are in the land they are to live by God's word seen in God's laws. And Moses is just about to teach them those laws like the Ten Commandments in chapter 5. You just turn over the page you can see them there there's the Ten Commandments and the laws will continue on for a number of chapters. But before he gets there he has chapter 4 to tell them why it's worth obeying those laws.

[4 : 01] Why it's worth living by those words. And he starts with a pragmatic reason to obey God's law which is point 1 in your outline and verse 1 in your Bibles. He says now Israel hear the decrees and laws that I'm about to teach you in chapter 5 and following. And he says follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God the God of your ancestors is giving you. Do not add to what I command you. Do not subtract from it but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

You see they are to obey God's law without adding or subtracting to it. Why? Well firstly so that they will live he says and not just live but live in the land. And this land is God's gift to them as he promised. That's why at the end of verse 1 God says I am giving it to you. It's a gift. But if they don't trust and obey God when God says look here it is then by default they're going to miss out. It's like me saying I've got a gift for you. Here it is come and grab it. But if you don't trust me and turn away then by default you're going to miss out. That's what happened to the first generation of Israel.

And what's more if they don't obey God when God says worship me then instead of enjoying blessing in the land they'll end up enjoying well not really enjoying but receiving judgment and miss out.

And that's what happened to some of them a couple of years ago when they were in Moab. So remember the map there's Moab just above Edom. They were to pass through there. They weren't to fight with them but they went to the other extreme. Some of them actually ended up worshipping the Moabite god of Baal. Probably because a lot of the men did this because it involved having sex with a Baal temple prostitute and then worshipping the god. That was the practice at Numbers 25.

And so because they did not follow God but disobeyed him shamefully then God judged him. You see verse 3? You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did at Baal Peor. The Lord your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor. That's Peor's in Moab. But all of you who held fast to the Lord your God are still notice alive today. You see obeying God's commands gives life. In this case literally. It helped them to live well and avoid judgment. When our kids if they obey they get to enjoy the things that we have prepared for them that day. But if they disobey then they end up sitting in their room and missing out. Or so too for Israel. In fact this is how Moses ends his first this part of this sermon in verse 40. So if you just turn over the page to the last verse verse 40. He says keep it keep God's decrees and commands which I'm giving you today so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you for all time. You see the first reason was almost a pragmatic reason. Israel was to obey God's law because it helped them to live and live well as his people in the land. To live long in the land rather than miss out. Now of course we too are to obey God's law though not necessarily all the Old Testament commands which Moses gave and I'll talk about which ones and how to work it out next week. But we are to obey God's word so that we might live well in terms of godliness.

[7 : 46] We are to obey God's word because it does bring like more contentment in life. A happier life but not wealthier. Happier. So I remember one lady deciding to become a Christian and she said she felt this peace and joy that she'd never known before. And no matter how many new clothes she bought or nights she went out partying, knowing God gave her a deeper sense of joy than she'd known before. And so it is true that we are to obey that we might live well in terms of godliness and that following God's way does bring deep contentment and joy. But Moses's reason here to Israel is so that they would live well in terms of wealth and that they would live long in the land, verse 40 said. That they would avoid judgment of death like those in verses 3 and 4. But if we obey God now in this life we won't necessarily be wealthy, will we?

In fact sometimes we won't be. And if we obey God now in this world we won't necessarily live a long life, will we? The application is a bit different for us. You see our promised land was not Israel back there and then. Our promised land is the new heavens and earth. And through Jesus God has given us his spirit who works through our conscience and helps us obey. What's more, Jesus has already taken our judgment of death completely at the cross. And so when we don't obey we can still be forgiven time and time again. Whenever we are genuinely sorry and ask for forgiveness we don't have to feel like Israel feared.

And all this means that our promised land is guaranteed. Jesus has secured it for us as I tried to show you last week. And so the New Testament does not say keep his decrees so that you will live long in the land as he did to Israel. Rather the New Testament says keep his decrees because you will live long in the land.

In fact for eternity in the new heavens and new earth. So let me show you from 2 Peter. So this should have a slide there from 2 Peter. We'll skip that one. Next one. So Peter writes this, in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heavens and a new earth. The home of righteousness. That's our promised land.

And then notice, so then dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, since it's already yours, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. In other words we are to obey God and be godly now. Not so that we can have a long life in this world, but because Christ has already secured for us eternal life in the world to come. It's out of response you see.

[10 : 37] And so while obeying God will often mean a happier life now, that's not the same reason as it was for Israel. For Israel it was worth obeying God's law so that they might live long in the land.

But the second reason Israel was to obey God's law was so that they could be a witness. Point 2 verse 5. He says, see I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about these decrees and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

You see in the ancient Near East where Israel was, God's laws were more humane, more just and more loving than any other ancient laws. And so Israel were to obey them that the other nations around might see their wisdom and understanding so that the other nations might think, hey, how cool is this nation? Let's check them out, join them, be part of God's people.

You see, these laws were to set them apart from the other nations, make them stand out like salt and light, like a city on a hill stands out, so that other nations might come and hear about God and convert, be part of God's people. And if you remember Job, you remember Job, the three promises, land, offspring, blessing. It's in this way that God would keep his promise to bless not just Israel, but all nations through them. For nations would hear of Israel's greatness and come and join them and share in Israel's blessings. Of course, like us, we can forget how privileged we are as God's people.

And in case Israel forgot, Moses reminds them in verse seven, he says, what other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him. And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws that I'm setting before you today? You see, God has not only saved them from slavery in Egypt, brought them to himself, he remained close to them, dwelt among them at the tabernacle, in fact, in the middle of their camp. And he listened to them whenever they prayed, gave them laws to help them live well in the land. No other nation on earth had that.

[13:07] They were a privileged people. But with that great privilege comes great responsibility. Is that the Spider-Man quote? Great. Anyway, they had the responsibility to obey God's laws so that other nations would see and be drawn to them. And it's similar for us too. We had to live godly lives that we might make the gospel attractive. We had to obey God and be godly so that people might see and join us as well. And so on the next slide, Paul writes this to Titus. He says, he tells people to be good and do the right thing so that they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

Or as Jesus says, you are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. And so in the same way, let your light shine, your good deeds, your godliness shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. So there are two reasons that Israel would obey God's law. The pragmatic one is help them to live well and long in the land without being judged.

But there's an evangelistic one as well, to be a witness to the other nations, that they might hear about Israel's greatness and join God's people too. But the third reason why God's laws were worth living by is the relevance of God's word to them.

Point three, verse nine. He says, only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live.

Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb or Mount Sinai, same place, when he said to me, assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children. You have come near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens with black clouds and deep darkness. Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form. There was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant, the ten commandments which he commanded you to follow, and then wrote them on two stone tablets. And the Lord directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws that you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. Now there's a couple of things to notice here. Notice firstly that God's laws are given by God's word. So have a look at verse 12 again. You really do need a Bible in front of you. At verse 12 he says, then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form. There was only a voice. Verse 13, he declared with words to you his covenant, the ten commandments, which is literally the ten words. And Moses wrote them down on stone tablets. You see how Moses highlights that God's law comes by way of God's word. That's how it comes. It's all about God's word. That's the first thing to notice. But the second thing to notice is that God's word is given to them, the second generation. They weren't actually there at Sinai. That's the thing to realize. When Moses gives this book of Deuteronomy, it's to the second generation. Remember the green dot?

[16 : 34] But Sinai happened to the first generation almost 40 years ago. But Moses is speaking as though this second generation was back there, as though they were there with the first generation. See verse 11?

He says, you, second generation, came near and stood at the foot of the mountain. Well some of them hadn't even been born yet while it was blazed with fire. Or verse 12, then the Lord spoke to you, the second generation, green dot, out of the fire even though they weren't there. You heard the sound of words but saw no form. Verse 13, he declared to you his covenant and on it goes. Now how can Moses say this when the second generation weren't even there? Some of them weren't even born 40 years ago at Mount Sinai. How can Moses say this? Well because God's word to their parents 40 years ago is just as relevant to them today. So relevant it's as though they were there. You see Moses knows that God's word is living and active such that it speaks to us today just as powerfully and with the same authority as it spoke to the people back there and then. And so this second generation are to obey God's word because it's as though God is speaking directly to them as though they were there. It has the same relevance for them today as it did for their parents who heard it 40 years ago.

And it's an important point to remember because there's a trend these days to think that Christians need to have an experience of God apart from his word to be really Christian. So I spoke a while ago about my friends who said to Michelle and I that or Michelle and me that if we had not had a second baptism of the spirit whatever that means that we are not true Christians. Oh when I was growing up it was the Toronto blessing where people would laugh and fall down on the ground and make animal noises all sorts of things which apparently was part of being blessed by God. Sounds like an embarrassing blessing to me but or other ministries will say you know look up the sky is our maker's manuscript whispering truths to us about who we are and why we're here and that God is not found where people usually say and so they imply that it's not the Bible where we meet God but it's creation that's where we do experience God. And there are churches not far from here where the minister avoids using the Bible because it's too ordinary. After all it's just a book isn't it? And sometimes it's hard to understand or too academic as some people at our church have said. And to be honest it is sometimes hard to understand and it does sometimes require effort but it's still how God primarily speaks to us. It is still as relevant for us today as it was back then. And so we have a family at this congregation who came here because the church they first visited didn't open the Bible and they so asked the minister about this and the minister replied well if you want a church that teaches the Bible go to HTD.

I thought what a compliment. I'm not sure the minister meant it that way. But you see Moses says to this second generation of Israelites that God's word is still as relevant to them today as it was to their parents 40 years ago. So relevant it's as though they were there. And if they want an experience of God then they had to look at his word and remember. So turn back to page to verse 9 and 10. He says only be careful, verse 9, be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes, even though they weren't there, your eyes have seen or let them fade from your hearts as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day that you, even though you weren't there, you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb and when he said dot dot dot. You see they're not only to teach their children the law of God but they're also to teach their children the experience of God. They're not to look for another experience themselves with a stone idol, the religion of the Canaanites or in our terms today, you know, getting lost in creation or a second baptism and so on. No, they're not to look for another experience, rather they are to remember the experience God has already given them. They're to look in his word and remember that day when God spoke to them out of the fire. That's the experience they are to have. Of course for us today, we have something greater than Mount Sinai to remember. We have the cross of Christ. And so if we want to experience an experience of God, then we are to go to his word and remember the cross as though we were there. We are to remember how God came to earth in his son to die for us so that we can be forgiven if we believe in him. It's by remembering that event in his word that we experience God. That's how we have experiences of God. I conducted a funeral earlier this week for a member of our church and his wife said that I did a good job and I didn't go on forever. But you see, we do spend some time reading God's word and having explained every Sunday here, don't we? Why? Well, because God's word is still relevant for us today.

It's primarily how God speaks to us. And so this is what we are to teach each other and our children in ways they can understand, of course. We are to look to Christ in his word and not for something more, not for some other experience or philosophy or tradition, as we heard in Colossians or in Israel's case for idols. Now we're to stick with God and his word. And so in verses 15 to 31, Moses warns Israel against idols because that was their particular issue. But the point here is that these laws are worth obeying, worth living by, because they are God's very words spoken to them as though they were there.

[23 : 12] And they're as relevant to them today as they were for their parents back then. That's his point. But fourthly, God's laws are also worth obeying, worth living by, because of the one who gave them.

Point four, and we'll pick it up at verse 32. Let's have a look at verse 32. Ask now about the former days long ago before your time, from the day God created human beings on earth.

Ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened? Or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of the fire as you have and lived?

Has any God ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God. Besides him, there is no other. Here, Moses reminds them of what God has done for them, which has never happened since creation.

[24 : 24] What has God done? Well, he's done two things. He's firstly spoken to them and he's saved them from Egypt, obviously in different chronological order.

He has spoken to them, verse 34, and he has saved them, verse 34.

Why? Well, verse 35, so that they might know that the Lord is God and besides him, there is no other. And in case they've missed the point, Moses repeats it.

Only this time, he adds a lot more personal pronouns. You know, the word you to really drive it home. Notice how many times the word you comes up. Verse 36, he repeats, From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you.

On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire. Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he has brought you out of Egypt by his presence and his great strength.

[25 : 23] To drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you, And to bring you into their land, to give it to you for your inheritance as it is today.

See what Moses is saying? Verse 36, God has spoken to you. He says the same thing again. Or he says verse 37, and God has saved you, loved you, chosen you, rescued you.

God has done all this. Why? Well, verse 39, that you might acknowledge and take to heart this day, That the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below.

There is no other. And that you might keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, So that it may go well with you and your children after you, And that you may live long in the land that the Lord your God has given you for all time.

See, because God has saved them from slavery in Egypt, Spoken to them from Sinai, Then in response they are to acknowledge that God is God. And so obey him above all others.

[26 : 30] Why are God's laws worth living by? Well, because God is the one who saved them and spoke to them. And so in response, he alone is to be their God.

He alone is to be the one whom they obey. And this is really the big reason for us too, is it not? For it's through Jesus that God has spoken to us and saved us from sin.

We heard this from our second reading. So on our last slide there, it says, In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times in various ways. But notice, in these last days, he has spoken to us, how?

By his son. God has spoken to us through Jesus. And what has Jesus done? Well, he's provided purification for sins. And then sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

See, God has spoken to us fully and definitively in his son, Jesus. And it's Jesus whose blood paid for our sins so that we could be forgiven, purified with the promise of heaven.

[27 : 29] So if he is the one who has done all this for us, how are we to respond? Same way. Acknowledge that God alone is God and that we would obey him above all others.

I shared with the evening congregation a couple of weeks ago, a guy from my old church who had not long become a Christian. He got engaged to a girl in the congregation. And then his friends threw him a bucks party.

And most of his friends were not Christians, though. And so they hired a, well, a dancer, shall we say. But he told his friends that he didn't want to be part of it because it wouldn't be pleasing to God.

Now, his friends teased him and paid him out and told him to just do it. But you see, he knew Christ had died for him. And so in response, he wanted to please God more than his friends.

He wanted to obey God more than his friends. And so he ended up actually walking out on his own bucks party. Now, I realize that this is a more suitable illustration for the young adults at 5 p.m.

[28 : 35] But nonetheless, you get the point, don't you? Or perhaps a more suitable illustration for us, it's why I teach my kids to live God's way.

Because God gave his son for us. And so if they ever argue or things like that, I will actually break out in song from the kids' song today. And you know I can't sing, right? So they hate it.

You know, in the Bible. You're fighting? Well, here we go again. In the Bible. Be kind to one another. And off we go. Do I do it just to annoy them? Oh, partly, I suppose. But it's mostly because I want them to obey God.

For God has given his son for them. That's the big reason we ought to obey. So why are these words here worth living by? Well, firstly, they help us live joyfully and godly lives in this world and in light of our promised land to come.

Secondly, they enable us to witness to the nations. Thirdly, they are God's very spoken words to us and are still relevant for us today. And fourthly, because it's God who speaks to us and who has saved us by his son.

[29 : 42] And so in response, he alone is to be our God. He alone is to be the one whom we obey. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. And we thank you for your word that you gave Israel.

And we thank you for your greater word of the gospel that you have given us. Father, in response to what you've done for us in Jesus, help us to keep living for you, to keep obeying you, to keep living by your word.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.