

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

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[0 : 00] in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verses 1 to 9. I want to spend some time thinking about instruction that we have in these verses, very much in the light of the sacrament that will follow. Well, we've read the passage there in Deuteronomy chapter 6, and the setting of the passage could hardly be more dramatic. The people of God have wandered for forty years in the wilderness, and now they stand on the threshold of finally taking possession of the promised land. They had, of course, stood at this point before, only to fall short, and the tension is palpable. Will it be different this time? They can see the promised land across the Jordan.

They can practically smell it and touch it. It's that close. But will they enter and take possession of the promised land? And before the people gathered there stands a man who has become, over these decades that have gone by, a national institution, the only leader they have ever known. He has spoken to them more times than they care to remember. But this day is different. Today, he has gathered them for what will be his final discourse. And there would have been, I'm sure, there on the plains of Moab, a mixture of emotions, sadness, fear, trepidation, excitement. But I'm sure that for all there was a sense of expectation regarding what the big man before them would say. What he would say on that day, like the words of a father on his deathbed, would remain with them for all of their lives. But what of this big man before them? What of him? He had once stood tall and dominant, but the wandering years have taken their toll. His mind, though, is sharp, and his love for the people before him is deep and tender. And what will be his parting gift? Well, he will give them the very best that he can give. And what he will give them is words, not just any words, but words of life, words of God. Let's listen to what Moses himself says about these words that he will give them at the very end of this discourse. For that, we have to turn several chapters through to chapter 32 of Deuteronomy.

Chapter 6, we are at the very beginning of this sermon, of this delivery, but we want to turn to the very end to notice how Moses himself describes the words that he gives to the people on this occasion.

[3 : 23] In chapter 32 and from verse 45, we read, When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them, Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law.

They are not just idle words for you. They are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

These words, properly received, understood, and obeyed, will result in tremendous blessing for the people. Moses knows this, and born of his deep and tender love for them and their children. He lays out for them this alluring prospect of a full, a long, a happy, a fulfilled life, not only for them, but for the forthcoming generations.

And that is the purpose of these words that he delivers to them as his final gift to the people. In the language of the passage that we've read in Deuteronomy chapter 6, why does he give them these words?

[4 : 57] Well, then in verse 3 we read, So that it may go well with you. So that it may go well with you. We are not going to consider the whole content of this delivery, but certainly within it there are so many rules and regulations.

And at a superficial glance, it might seem such a burdensome thing that he brings to them, but Moses is very clear. The reason I bring these words is so that it may go well with you.

And then in verse 3, notice the language that he uses. So that it may go well with you, and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey.

In verse 2, So that you, your children and their children after them, may fear the Lord your God as long as you live, by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you.

This is the purpose of the words, that you, your children and their children after them, may fear the Lord your God.

[6 : 03] So Moses speaks of this great prospect that those who listen would have children who fear God. Now we might ask the question, and no doubt the language that we use would elicit from some the question, well, is that such an alluring prospect? Do I want children who fear God?

Maybe to help us understand this language that Moses uses, we can refer to an occasion when Moses used the same kind of language, indeed, 40 years previously, when they had been at a very similar point, but their entry to the promised land had been frustrated.

We notice in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 20, we just read the words there. We'll notice the same language of fear, and we want to just consider a little what it means.

Exodus chapter 20 and verse 20, Moses said to the people, You wonder, does that even make sense?

In the same sentence, he says, Don't be afraid, and then he says, Be afraid. Well, it does make sense if we understand what Moses is saying. When he speaks of the fear of God, he's speaking of that fear that frees us from all other fear.

[7 : 41] Fear God that you might fear no one and nothing else. For to fear God is to have a deep respect for God, to understand who He is in all His glory and majesty and holiness, or at least in a measure to understand who He is.

Like a child, to fear the frown of your father, where that frown is evidence of His concern for your welfare, and His knowledge that the sin He forbids will bring you pain and hurt.

You fear His frown, but you also long for and cherish His approving smile. And I say very especially to a Christian appearance gathered here this morning, there can be no greater gift, no greater heritage to pass on to your children than that they, as they model you, learn to fear God.

By all means, provide for them a caring and a loving home. And of course, you must. Secure for them a first-class education. Mold them into responsible and conscientious citizens.

Seek to inculcate in them a respect for others who are different from you and from them. But above all, teach them to fear God.

[9 : 07] And if you do this, all these things will be added unto them. A child who fears God will respect others. A child who fears God will be a responsible and conscientious citizen.

A child who fears God will become, in due course, a father or a mother who loves for and cares for their own children. So, we must teach our children to fear God.

This was the concern of Moses as he begins this parting gift, this parting discourse to the people. But how can we do this? How can we seek to ensure that our children become those who fear God?

Well, we have to listen to the words. Listen to the words. Moses concluded his discourse by making it clear that these were not idle words, but they were words of life. And so, we must listen to the words.

And what the words say concerning what you can and must do. Indeed, the duties that we will identify here are particularly parental duties, but there is a sense in which they are duties that are incumbent on us even when we are not parents.

[10 : 25] But particularly our concern this morning is on these duties as parental duties of covenant parents. There's three duties that I think we can find and identify in these verses that we've read in Deuteronomy chapter 6.

And they are as follows. Know your God, live the life, and instruct your child. Know your God, live the life, instruct your child.

And as we fulfill these duties, and in a moment we'll be thinking what this involves, but let me just state at the outset, and to state it clearly, as we fulfill these duties, we should expect our children to grow into an appreciation of their covenant privileges, a fulfilling of their covenant responsibilities, and an embracing of their covenant God.

As we as parents fulfill these duties, this is what we should expect for our children. First of all, then, the first duty identified, to know your God.

Notice the language that Moses uses as he addresses the people in verses 4 and 5. Heed, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[11 : 48] Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. And particularly the language, the possessive language, the language of our God and your God.

The people that Moses is addressing, the people of God, they're not simply to believe in God, but to experience a personal relationship with God.

We must know God in that relational or personal way. What do we mean by that? Well, this weekend, we are thinking particularly of our noble queen.

In Scotland, we may not be great fans of street parties, but nonetheless, as loyal citizens, we recognize and we celebrate her years of rule over us.

Well, as we think of the queen, I ask you the question, do you know the queen? You know a great deal about her. And indeed, if you are watching TV or listening to the radio over the next two or three days, you'll discover a great deal more about her that maybe you didn't know already.

[12 : 57] You've heard her speak on many occasions. How many post-Christmas lunch rituals of listening to the queen give her Christmas address?

No doubt you have an opinion concerning her. But do you know her personally? I'd imagine. I may be mistaken, but most would have to respond, Well, no, I don't know her personally.

I know who she is. I know a great deal about her. But I don't know her personally. Well, to apply that illustration, if you wish, to the language that Moses is using here, he's using a language concerning God that is speaking of a personal relationship, not just knowing about God, but knowing God personally.

To speak of God as your God or as our God is to speak of one with whom you have a relationship. The particular relationship is of a son-father relationship.

He's our God. He is our Father. Now, how is that possible? How is it possible to have that kind of personal relationship with God? Now, time doesn't allow us to delve into that question in any depth at all.

[14 : 12] But allow me to limit myself to read words that we find in John's gospel, and in chapter 1 and in verse 12, that are pertinent to this question of how is it possible to enjoy that personal relationship with God.

Listen to what John says there in verse 12 of the first chapter of his gospel. This is the way that God has given to us, This is the way that God has given to us, that we might enter into that personal relationship with himself.

As we put our trust in Jesus, as we believe in Jesus, so we are granted the right and the privilege, the status of children of God, and so be able to speak of God in the manner that Moses does, as our God.

Now, of course, being in a relationship with God must involve and does involve knowing about God. I've been stressing that it's not just about knowing about God, but it certainly does involve knowing about Him, who He is, and what He is like.

And indeed, in the language that Moses uses here in these verses, this is evident. And verse 4 is a distilled confessional statement of the faith of Israel.

[15 : 58] Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And Moses, in these few words, is able to present great truths about God, about who He is.

First of all, in these few words, we are told that this God is a personal God who has a name. The Lord, or Yahweh. So this God of whom we speak is a personal God.

The very name that He has reveals something of who He is. Yahweh. I am that I am. The self-existent, self-sufficient, eternal God.

And He is one. The Lord our God. The Lord is one. There is no other. In Him there is perfect unity. And yet, in the light of the further revelation of Scripture, a unity that does not preclude a plurality in God.

And so, even though we stress the importance of a personal relationship with God, that is a relationship that surely does involve, and of course does involve, a knowledge of Him, and who He is, and what He is like.

[17 : 08] Know your God. This is the first duty incumbent on covenant parents. If you are to bring up your children to fear God, if this prospect that Moses presents before the people of children who know and fear God, if that is something that you are drawn to, if this is what you want for your children, then it is incumbent upon you to know your God.

This is your duty and your privilege. Know your God. Cultivate your relationship with Him. How can you aspire to your children knowing God, if you hardly know Him yourself?

First of all, then, know your God. But also, the words of Moses place upon us a second duty, and that is to live the life. In verse 5, we read, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Here we are concerned with the way in which we teach by example, especially as parents we teach by example. We are role models for our children.

Now, sometimes that's quite a frightening prospect, to recognize that that's the way it is. We often realize that it's that way when we do it badly.

[18 : 31] And we see in our children traits and behavior and maybe even language that we don't like at all, and then we're struck by the fact, well, they've learned it from us.

You see, whether we like it or not, we are role models for our children. We may be good role models or we may be very bad role models. But role models we are. And so, the manner in which we live our lives will have a huge impact on the manner in which they grow up to live their lives. To live the life involves at heart loving God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Indeed, to love God or to live the life follows on from knowing God. It's a necessary consequence of true knowledge. But what does it look like?

Well, to live the life is to live a life of loving God. And that command that Moses has there for us in verse 5, the evidence that we are keeping the command to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, the evidence that we are keeping the command is demonstrated in the obeying of all the other commands.

[19 : 53] We remember the words of Jesus recorded for us in John's Gospel in chapter 14. If you love me, keep my commands. How can we demonstrate that we love God?

How can we know ourselves that the love we profess is genuine and sincere? Well, Jesus gives us a great help in this regard. You say you love me?

Well, if you love me, keep my commands. Loving obedience is the life that we are to live. And loving obedience will have some of the following features that are mentioned or referred to in the verses of our passage.

Loving obedience is broad in its scope. Notice that in verse 2, So that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all His decrees and commands that I give you.

All His decrees, all His commands. It's not for us to pick and choose those that are convenient for us or to leave aside those that are burdensome upon us. No, loving obedience is broad in its scope.

[21 : 03] Loving obedience is persistent and permanent. As we've just read, as long as you live. Not in the flush of a newfound love or after a particularly uncomfortable sermon or passage that we've read and we say, well, I'm going to make a big effort now.

No. Permanently, persistently, as long as you live. And to do so also with care or meticulously. Again, there in verse 3, notice the language Moses uses.

Hear, O Israel, and be careful. Be careful to obey so that it may go well with you. And I say to parents particularly, though this is a challenge that is appropriate for all believers.

But to parents particularly, I would ask you to take a moment to examine yourself as to the nature of your loving obedience. Is it meticulous?

Is it not the case that as the months go by and as the years go by, we can become careless in our Christian living? And as we are careless, so we find ourselves disobeying God in a variety of ways.

[22 : 19] And Moses here challenges us. Be careful. Be careful in your obedience. The obedience that you are to render, this loving obedience, is to be a meticulous obedience that it may go well for you and your children and indeed their children after them.

But as we think of just some of the features of this loving obedience, broad in scope, persistent and permanent, meticulous, we also recognize that above all and underpinning all of the above, loving obedience is wholehearted.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. And as you live the life, as you love the Lord your God in this manner, you can be sure that your children will notice.

They will experience a home that is characterized by that kind of love. So, this duty is also upon you as you would bring up your children, not only to know your God, but also to live the life.

But thirdly and finally and briefly, notice a third duty, very much related to the previous ones, and that is to instruct your child, particularly the very specific instructions given by Moses there from verse 6 and onwards.

[23 : 49] These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. Instruct your child. Now, we have to be very clear, and maybe this is self-evident, but that it's not possible to instruct your child, certainly adequately, if you are failing in the first of the two duties.

If you don't know your God, if you don't live the life, how will you be able to consequently, to seriously, to effectively instruct your child?

If you don't know God, if you don't love God, you will not be able to adequately instruct your child.

That said, and that understood, we can notice some features of this instruction as Moses presents it to us.

And just notice three features of this instruction. Notice, first of all, that this instruction is to be diligent and repeated. The language used in verse 7 of impress them on your children.

[25 : 05] These commandments impress them on your children. It carries the idea of repetition.

Well, what is commanded in verses 8 and 9, though it may seem peculiar to us, is simply ways that are given that we might constantly bring before our children God's Word and God's commandment.

Symbols on your hands, bind them on your foreheads, write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. Different ways of bringing before our children permanently and repeatedly the Word of God and the commandments of God.

So, our instruction is to be diligent. It is to be repeated. It is to be systematic. It is to be constant. But also, married with that, the instruction that we give is to be natural and personal.

The language of verse 7 is so beautiful in the picture that it paints of the relationship enjoyed between parents and children. Talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up.

At mealtimes, in everyday activities, in spontaneous conversation. In the multiplicity of activities that you are able to enjoy with your children, and indeed ensure that you do have those times of spending time with them, that that would provide the opportunity for this kind of natural, spontaneous instruction.

[26 : 39] You see, your home is the principal classroom in which your child will learn to fear God. Not this sanctuary, important though it is. Not the Sunday school classrooms downstairs, important though they are.

The principal classroom where your child will learn to fear God is your home. As you walk along the road, as you lie down, as you get up, as you sit with them at home.

So, this instruction is to be diligent and careful and repeated, natural and personal. And there's a third element that I'm just going to mention now and then touch on as we proceed to the baptism.

A third element of this instruction is that it is to be expectant instruction. But we'll leave that to one side and come back to it just as we proceed to the baptism.

So, I say to parents, especially this morning, do you want your children to live a full and a happy life? Do you want your children to know, fear, and love God?

[27 : 43] Then you must listen to the words. Listen to the words. These are not idle words. These are words of life. Listen to the words. Know your God.

Live the life. Instruct your child. But as we draw things to a conclusion, I want to end with words of warning, very solemn warning.

The words that we're considering, just a few of the words at the very beginning of this great discourse of Moses to the people. They were words that formed part of a great sermon.

They were delivered by a great preacher by Moses. And I imagine, in as much as we can, I imagine that all who were gathered there and who heard these words, they were moved.

Some were perhaps in tears. Fathers and mothers exchanged concerned and annoying looks as they were challenged concerning their responsibilities. No doubt many solemnly determined that

they would do as they had been instructed.

[28 : 51] And yet, though all of these things no doubt happened on this great day when Moses spoke to the people. Listen to what we are told in the book of Judges in chapter 2.

Judges chapter 2 and verses 8 to 10. Listen to what happened not long afterwards that has a bearing on the measure in which people really did take on board what they heard.

In Judges chapter 2 and verse 8 we read, Joshua, son of Nun, Joshua we know, the one who followed on from Moses who was present there in that audience.

Joshua, son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath, Heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gash.

And then these sobering words, After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers.

Now, who are they? Well, they're the audience when Moses spoke.

[29 : 53] The words that we've been thinking about this morning. After that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up. Their children, the ones who presumably should have been the object of this instruction.

Another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. These are very solemn words. This generation who had heard these words, who had been challenged by Moses, Know your God, live the life, instruct your children.

And yet, so, so many of them, though they were moved, though they shed tears, though they gave intellectual assent to all that was said, no doubt, But they failed to do so.

And a generation grew up who knew not the Lord nor all that he has done. We are only one generation away from apostasy.

We're only one generation away from a godless nation. It is what this generation does that will determine what the next generation will be like.

[30 : 58] And so, let us take heed. And let us take heed to this solemn and sad warning concerning what happened to that congregation who heard these words of Moses and the children who followed them.

Let us pray.