Whole-Hearted: Loving the Difficult God of Deuteronomy

Additional Sermon Ideas

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Title: A Place Called Home

Text: A survey of texts related to YHWH’s gift of land throughout the book.

Focus Statement: God’s promise to his adopted children is to transform the harsh and alienating world they occupy into a place they can truly belong and call “home” because of his beneficent presence.

Function Statement: To stoke the fires of hope in believers that they are drawing ever nearer to a place of rest and abundance where they can truly feel at home in God’s loving presence.

Key Ideas to Emphasize

* Deuteronomy begins by warning us not to make the same mistake the exodus generation did by refusing God’s gracious gift of a home. We must allow no obstacle or enemy to prevent our recognizing or our claiming our divinely ordained inheritance of an eternal home with God. We can trust God to bring us home if we will persevere in lovingly and obediently following him (Deut. 1:8-36)
* A home with God is a gift complete with everything needed for life and enjoyment. Receive it gratefully and remember that it is YHWH’s gift and not our achievement (Deut 6:3,10-12; 11:9; 26:9,15; 27:3; 31:20)
* God has not given up on the idea of Eden but is leading us to a home as restful and abundant as the primordial garden (Deut 8:7-10;
* Moses also warns us not to covet other peoples’ lands but to rest content with God’s promise of a good land of our own. God has designated land for all nations in the hopes of uniting all humanity in a descendant of Abraham (Deut 2:5-23)
* The fact that home is a divine gift does not preclude our responsibility in ordering and settling it (Deut 3:2-24)
* The gift of a home with God comes with house rules. There is a certain way of living in the world that ensures our eternal enjoyment of it as God’s new creation/New Eden. Breech of our covenant with YHWH jeopardizes our participation in the inheritance. (Deut 5:16-33; 29:24-28)
* Protect the justice, purity and sanctity of the home God has given you so that it can be a refuge and you can participate in its transformation into the new creation (Deut 4:41-43; 16:18-20; 19:1-10; 21:1-9; 22-23; 24:1-4; 25:15)
* It is always possible to come home even when you’ve left and no matter how far you’ve strayed. YHWH will escort his scattered, lost children back to their inheritance. (Deut 30:1-10)

Title: The Contented Clergy: God’s Priestly People as Models of Joyful Dependence

Text: Deut 18:1-8; 8:1-10

Focus Statement: Just as the Levitical priests modeled contentment with God as their inheritance, so does the priesthood of all believers model joyful contentment with lives of worldly deprivation and divine dependence.

Function Statement: To remind Christians of our priestly function in the world and our responsibility to model for the world an alternative to the covetous, competitive culture of greed and scarcity.

Key Ideas to Emphasize

* The tribe of Levi’s exclusion from possession of a plot of land served as a model to all of Israel to recognize YHWH’s presence as the true gift, the true inheritance.
* Levites also modeled contentment and dependence as their livelihood depended on Israel’s faithful tithes and offerings.
* The Levites also taught Israel to care for and support those who were called to be YHWH’s full-time servants. (cf. 1 Cor 9:3-14)
* In so far as Israel as a whole was a royal priesthood, she modeled these same qualities to the world even as the Levites modeled them to her (Exod 19:6; Ps 16:5; 119:57; 1 Pet 2:9)

Title: Communication 101: How the Covenant Shapes Our Relationship with God and the World

Text: Deuteronomy 18:9-22

Focus Statement: God prohibits communication that is manipulative, impersonal, or mechanistic to protect the covenant relationship from deterioration. A succession of prophets culminating in Christ, therefore, models and mediates healthy communication between God and his people.

Function Statement: To cultivate listening, discerning hearts that are receptive to God’s word and resistant to all unhealthy ways of relating to and communicating with God.

Key Ideas to Emphasize:

* YHWH’s main problem with the divinatory practices of Israel’s neighbors was their manipulative and impersonal character. These were attempts to wrest information from reticent, taciturn deities rather than loving, grateful responses to revelation.
* Divination is based on the fundamental misconception that gods hide from us what we need to know and that we must “outsmart” them into giving up some of their prized information. Extispicy, for example, presumed that the gods hid information in the entrails of sacrificial animals that only specially trained priests could read. This was precisely the misunderstanding that the serpent encouraged Eve to adopt in Eden (Gen 3).
* Contemporary expressions of this same misunderstanding exist. For example, the idea that a certain formula or posture for prayer guarantees the desired result, what Jesus referred to as “vain repetition” (Matt 6:7), is akin to divination, as is believing that jewelry depicting a cross or other religious symbol functions like a talisman for spiritual protection. YHWH never conveys his gifts through such impersonal, mechanistic means.
* Proper divine-human relationship and communication must occur at YHWH’s initiative rather than human initiative. This was the problem with Babel (Gen 1-11)
* God’s people are to cultivate sensitivity to God’s word conveyed by the divine person of the Spirit through human prophets as well as discernment regarding a genuine vs. a counterfeit word from the LORD. John says it this way, “Test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1).