

## The Seeds of the Gospel are Planted

### Deuteronomy 32:48-34:12

**Intro: Whether for good or for bad, the life of a leader will often leave a mark.** Fidel Castro died this past week and his legacy, according to Dr. Al Mohler, is summed up in the phrase, *"Socialism or death."* Well . . . he eventually did get death but the Cuban people never got the socialism he promised and that is because socialism cannot work. As Dr. Mohler said, *"Someone else eventually has to pay the bills—if not in money, then in blood. That's the true legacy of Fidel Castro."*<sup>1</sup> Castro's life and death is not leaving a legacy of fruitfulness. Instead it is one of thorns.

**This morning we are going to look at the life and death of Moses.** His life and death was more than just a mark. In Moses' life and death we have planting of the seeds of the gospel.

Jesus said in **John 12:23-26**, *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."*

**Moses was a leader who lost his life for the sake of fulfilling God's call on his life.** His death culminated in the advent of Christ coming to earth to redeem His people. It is part of what we celebrate this Christmas season.

**To help us work through this last message on Deuteronomy, I want to ask the question:** where are the seeds of the gospel being planted? Not just how were they planted in **Deuteronomy 33 & 34** but how are they continuing to be planted through our lives? For Jesus said in **John 12:24** that *unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone but if it dies it bears much fruit.* Now he was talking about His life but he followed that statement with v. 26 and said, *"If anyone serve me, he must follow me, and where I am there will my servant be also."*

**So the question stands not just for the text but also for us:** *how are our lives as followers of Christ leaving a mark by planting seeds of the gospel? How are our lives planting seeds of the gospel in our city? How is our church leaving a mark on Ames by dying to itself and planting seeds of the gospel?*

#### Three points this morning:

- I. The seeds of the Gospel are planted in blessings of God (Deuteronomy 33)
- II. The seeds of the Gospel are planted in the Law of God (Deuteronomy 4:1, 32:44-47)
- III. The seeds of the Gospel are planted in the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34)

### Read Deuteronomy 33:1-5 & 26-29

#### I. The seeds of the Gospel are planted in blessings of God (Deuteronomy 33)

When we consider the blessings in **Deuteronomy 33** we might be tempted to get caught up in the amount of verses given to the blessings. **Verses 6-25** list the extraordinary blessings given to the tribes of Israel. They follow a similar pattern and content to Jacob's blessing of his sons in **Genesis 49** but they are somewhat different.

**This is not Jacob blessing his sons it is Moses blessing the nation of Israel and it is 400 years later.** The blessing Moses gives Israel is poem in the middle of a narrative for the nation of Israel stands at the boarder of the Promised Land and is ready to enter.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.albertmohler.com/2016/11/28/briefing-11-28-16/>

Here is what we need to remember when we consider these blessing. They are about the God who gives the blessing than the blessing given.

- The blessings are bookended by the redemptive work and character of Yahweh
  - Deuteronomy 33:2-5
  - Deuteronomy 33:26-29
  - The blessings are more about the greatness of God than they are about Israel
- Consider the general content of the blessings given to the tribes of Israel are about:
  - Yahweh promises the gift of divine protection
  - Yahweh will make them fruitful
  - Yahweh favors Israel
  - Yahweh will defeat Israel's enemies as they receive their inheritance.
- Let me a more specific summarization of the blessings given to the tribes in vv. 6-24:
  - Reuben was given discipline for its sin
  - Judah was charged to help and protect his brothers
  - Levi was told to teach Israel, make offerings, offer prayers because he was beloved by Yahweh
  - Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) was blessed by Yahweh and given power
  - Zebulun and Issachar was commanded to gather the people to make right sacrifices to Yahweh
  - Gad was charged to execute justice for the nation
  - Dan was given strength and vigor
  - Naphtali was blessed with the favor of Yahweh
  - Asher was blessed with the love of his brothers
- Here is how to think about these blessings. Israel was the family of God. These are not isolated blessings they were things every tribe was to be concerned about and practice. What each tribe was given was to be used for the good of the whole. They were to lead and bless one another with the gifts given them. The blessings were for the good of the whole nation not just an individual tribe.
- Transition: The way to think of these blessings for us in the church is like spiritual gifts God gives His church.

**Application: Here is how the seeds of the gospel grow in the church . . .**

- Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-16, "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men . . . And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ . . . <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."
- Yet here is the rub for us when we consider spiritual gifting within the church:
  - We live in a celebrity culture. Our celebrity culture influences us to seek fame and influence for our own glory.
  - Here is what happens in a celebrity culture: we lose sight of the power of ordinary faithfulness.

- We have an extraordinary God who gives gifts to His children in His church for the purpose of blessing the whole body in ordinary ways in our ordinary lives for the extraordinary mission He has called us to.
- **The seeds of the gospel are bearing extraordinary fruit when ordinary people use their gifts . . .**
  - . . . to pray for their neighbor or friend who is sick or struggling.
  - . . . in a well timed note of encouragement in a letter, text message or email. Just letting someone know you are thinking about them and praying for them.
  - . . . in a visit to the hospital or nursing home
  - . . . when you give cheerfully to the church or someone in need
  - . . . when we remind one another that the favor of God rests on us not because of what we have done but because of what Christ has done on our behalf
  - . . . when we teach in others in ordinary ways the importance of clinging to the good news of the gospel
- **What is an ordinary way you can bless someone this week?** How can you use the gift God has given you to bless someone? Remember when you do the seeds of the gospel are bearing extraordinary fruit in your life and in theirs.

## II. The seeds of the Gospel are planted in the Law of God (Deuteronomy 4:1, 32:44-47)

As we bring Deuteronomy to a close I think it is of value to summarize the relationship between God's people and the Law.

**When we think about the narrative/story of God giving His people His Law . . .**

- Yahweh had adopted Israel as His son.
- He used Moses to deliver them from slavery in Egypt.
- Then at Mt. Sinai He gave His people His Law in essence to instruct God's people how to live as God's people.
- Their destination was the Promised Land but because they sinned lacked faith on the plains of Moab they had to wander in the desert for 40 years yet the goal was still the same—get to the Promised Land.
- **We summarize His plan and promise in the phrase:** *The Kingdom of God is God's people in God's place under God's rule.*
- **Then as we moved through Deuteronomy we learned the importance of keeping Yahweh's commandments:**
  - **Deuteronomy 4:1,** *"And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and **do them**, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you."*
  - **Deuteronomy 27:26,** *"**Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.**' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"*
  - **Deuteronomy 32:44-47,** *"Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he and Joshua the son of Nun. <sup>45</sup> And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, <sup>46</sup> he said to them, "Take to heart **all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law.** <sup>47</sup> For it is **no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess."***

**Transition/Application:** But what is the relationship between the Law and the gospel? How do we view it as Christians? How does it impact our lives?

First some to exercises to illustrate and help us think through it:

1. **Illst: Here is a little exercise for us:** If you have been with us through this study of **Deuteronomy** I want you to think back over our journey through the book and especially **chapters 4-32** where the Law was applied to Israel as they moved into the Promised Land. Those were some heavy sermons because they addressed lists of rules and statutes and strict codes of righteousness. I don't know about you but when I read them I felt the exacting and unrelenting pressure of the Law.

**I felt like I could never measure up to the standard of the Law for it was applied without mercy.** It was straight up do this and don't do this and if you break even one of the rules statutes and commandments you're cursed because you have essentially broken them all.

2. **Illst: *The Pilgrim's Progress*: (Faithful encounters Moses)** In the book Christian and Faithful had become friends and were traveling together to the Celestial City. As they journeyed they were sharing their stories of how they came to be on their journey and Faithful told about when he met Moses. Faithful said:

*As soon as the man overtook me, he was but a word and a blow, for he knocked me down and laid me out for dead. But after I had somewhat come to my senses again, I asked him, "Why did you do that to me?" He said it was because of my secret inclination to follow after Adam the First; and with that, he struck me another deadly blow on the chest and beat me down backward, so I lay at his foot as if I were dead like before. When I came to myself again, I cried for him to have mercy; but he said, "I don't know how to show mercy!" And with that he knocked me down again. No doubt he would have made an end of me, except that another individual came by and caused him to stop.*

*"Who was it that made him stop?" asked Christian. "I didn't know him at first," said Faithful "but as He went by, I saw the holes in His hand and in His side. Then I concluded that He was our Lord. "That man who overtook you was Moses," explained Christian. "He spares no one, and he doesn't know how to show mercy to those who transgress his law."<sup>2</sup>*

3. **Illst: Last example: Consider this, why is it when people try to read the Bible through in a year they get stuck in Leviticus?** It is because of all of the rules, statutes and regulations on sacrifices and offerings are overwhelming to read. It is tedious reading.

Now imagine if you were the one having to carry it out and live it out just for the forgiveness of your sin. If you cannot even read it what makes you think you could live it? Our experience should be that of Isaiah who was overwhelmed and helpless as he exclaimed that his sin had done him in, "*woe as me I am undone.*" You would think, "The Old Covenant is killing me!" and you would be right for that is what it is designed to do—kill you.

**Here is the work of the word in the heart: Actually Leviticus ought to be one of the favorite books for Christians for it teaches you all that Jesus has fulfilled in order to purchase grace so that you can be in the presence of God. You should read it with great gratitude, worship and wonder at the mercy of our God in Christ.**

**Second a little more application:**

1. **The Law was never meant to make you feel good about yourself.** It was never meant to save. The Law was designed to show us our deep internal need. The Law commanded what we could never do. It demanded us to love God from the heart but we can never do that so when we read that sum of the Law is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and love

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<sup>2</sup>John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress in Modern English*, revised and updated by L. Edward Hazelbaker, pp. 95-96.

our neighbors in the same way we love ourselves that sounds good but all it does is condemn us because we are unable to do what the Law commands.

Even if you could keep the Law it still would not save because that is an external keeping of the Law and not kept from the heart. You see behavior modification will not save us either. It is going to take some very radical to transform us from the heart.

2. **So what was the purpose of the Law?** Here is our review, in Deuteronomy and the Old Testament, the Law functioned to show God's people how to live in the "if... then" relationship with Yahweh.

- So *if* the people of Israel obeyed Yahweh *then* they would be blessed but *if* they did not *then* they would be cursed. *They never were going to earn their salvation through the Law.*
- **Salvation was already given when they were delivered from Egypt.** What they were to do now was to live in light of this salvation. However, they were not able to do it. So while they could not earn their salvation their sin did condemn them for it meant that Israel had abandoned Yahweh's gracious salvation by breaking His Law.
- **Yet there was another problem was they were unable to stop sinning.** Also their offerings and sacrifices ultimately would not pay for their sin. They were in a mess.
- **They needed a New Covenant.** They needed a sacrifice that would cover their sin and something to enable them to love God with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength and that they were to love their neighbors in the same way they loved themselves.
- **The giving of the gospel is good news for lawbreakers.** The gospel is the good news that a New Covenant has come and that God has done in this covenant what the Old Covenant was never designed to do. The Old Covenant was always pointing to the coming of the New Covenant and really it is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant.
- **In the New Covenant the grace of God is seen in that Christ and did for us what we could never do.**
  - He is the perfect fulfillment of the sacrifices and festivals in Leviticus.
  - He is the Great High Priest who offers Himself as the sacrifice.
  - He is the only one who has ever loved God from the heart with all of His heart, soul, mind and strength and loved His neighbor as Himself.
  - In Christ we are blessed because He took our curse for breaking His very own Law.
  - You see in Christ the Law-Giver paid the price for those who broke His law on the cross.
  - In the Old Covenant the law-keepers said, "I did it." But in the New Covenant the law keepers say, "Christ did it."
- **I like the way Pastor Ernie Reisinger said it in his book *The Law and the Gospel*:**
  - The law addressed men as members of the old creation.  
The grace of Christ makes men members of the new creation.
  - The law manifests the sin that is in man.  
The grace of Christ manifests the mercy that is in God.
  - The law demands righteousness from man.  
The grace of Christ brings righteousness to man.
  - The law sentences the living man to death.

The grace of Christ brings dead men to life.

- The law speaks of what man must do for God.

The grace of Christ tells what God has done for man.

- The law brings the knowledge of sin.

The grace of Christ brings the remedy for sin.

- The law brings the will of God to man but gives no power to obey it.

The grace of Christ gives man desire to do the will of God and gives him the power to obey it.

- The law testified to God's righteousness.

The grace of Christ supplies and imparts His righteousness.<sup>3</sup>

3. **So what purpose does the Law now serve for Christians? Is it obsolete? Is it unchristian?** No. Initially the Law shows us we are lawbreakers. It is like the mirror that helps us see we need Jesus. The mirror of the Law does not send us back to the Law but it sends us to Jesus who kept the Law for us. We should know the Law but we also need to know the Law has no power to change us. Only a life centered on Jesus has the power to change. If you want transformation you look to Jesus not to the Law.

**The Apostle Paul never sent believers to the law for transformation.** Have you ever noticed that when you read his letters? How does he talk about transformation, discipleship, spiritual growth and sanctification?

Paul talks about Christians bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit but when you look at the fruit he describes it conforms to law yet he never sent the believers to the law. He sent them to Jesus the One who has already fulfilled the law in their place. So for transformation Christians do not begin with the law (law-centered) they begin by centering their lives on Christ, His work and what He has done (Christ-centered or Gospel-centered).

4. **Here are two ways we practically see the seeds of the gospel bearing fruit in our lives . . .**

- a. **Corporate worship:** The day of worship moved from the Sabbath (Saturday) to when Jesus rose from the dead. Corporate worship is not recalibrated around the resurrection of Christ.
- b. **Stewardship:** There is no New Testament text that teaches us to give 10%. Instead what we find about stewardship in the New Testament is that because of the abundance of grace that has been given that it overflowed in the joy of giving even when people were poor. They understood the depth of the grace given to them. This understanding comes from an internal changed. If you are not giving or you give grudgingly you might want to ask if you understand the gospel at all or find out what is wrong in your heart. You see God is not a stingy, dutiful giver of grace. No God makes all grace abound to His people so that in all things, at all times with all sufficiency they have all things so that they will abound in every good work.<sup>4</sup>

### III. The seeds of the Gospel are planted in the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34)

**Leaders leave a mark.** Moses' life and death planted the seeds of the gospel. Through Moses, God gave us the Law that leads us to the beauty of the gospel Jesus Christ. Consider how the seeds were planted at the end of Moses' life:

1. Moses was unable to live up to the standards he had given the people of Israel. [Deuteronomy 32:48-52]
2. Yet Moses' death was a precious picture of God's grace Deuteronomy 34:1-12:
3. After Moses' death leadership was transferred to Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land. Joshua 1:1-3

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest C. Reisinger, *The Law and the Gospel*, ps. 143-44.

<sup>4</sup> Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law, Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, NAC Studies in the Bible and Theology, series editor: E. Ray Clendenen, p. 283-85.

4. Yet even as great a leader as Joshua was; he died. There needed to be a leader greater than Moses and Joshua. **Joshua 24:29**
5. **Deuteronomy 18:15 plants the seeds of a greater leader who would come and he would do what Deuteronomy 30:6 says, he would circumcise the hearts of His people and cause them to love God from the heart.**
  - a. **Deuteronomy 18:15 is our Advent passage in Deuteronomy.** As we approach Christmas we are reminded each year that the Old Testament was always giving us promises of One who would come and set His people free from the slavery of sin and death and re-unite them to their God.
  - b. Yet for Jesus that meant He had to die.
  - c. He is the ultimate gospel-seed that was planted in **John 12:26**.

**Application: Here is what this means for us as we pull the dirt over the gospel seed at Grand Avenue Baptist Church.**

1. **Deuteronomy is a missionary book!** This book looks forward to not leading people to the Promised Land on real-estate but to Promised Land of Jesus. He is our great Inheritance!
  - a. Some of us are going to be called to plant our lives in the soil of some other place so that others may come to love the grace of God in Christ. You may be called to leave this state or the US to go and plant your life there.
  - b. For others of us it means that we must begin to think like missionaries right where we live. Friends we used to have to send missionaries around the world to do mission work but here is what you need to know as our nation changes. Culturally our nation used to have a measure of biblical literacy and respect for Christianity. This is no longer the case. I remember when I was younger a man who was a pastor or preacher was one of the most respected men in town but now this is not the case. Now and especially in our academic culture here in Ames a pastor is often viewed with suspicion and skepticism.

Don't hear what I am not saying. I am not complaining. I am merely making a comment on culture.

What I think this means is that our culture is not moving toward Christianity but away from it. This means is that those of us who stay need to think like missionaries in our own neighborhoods.
2. **So where are the seeds of the gospel planted?**
  - a. **They are planted right here in this church.**
    - i. Our strategy is to Gather, Grow, Go . . .
    - ii. Be a community missionary . . .
  - b. **They are planted when we plant churches.** At the conclusion of this service we will commission the Earles to go out and re-plant UBC. It was the death and resurrection of Christ that continues to raise up leaders to go out and disciple others to faith in Christ.

- **Silence and Prayer**