

“Living for God’s Vision” (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

We are in the series of “The Tree of Life.” We have been studying Pentateuch in this ten-week series. Today is the final session.

Deuteronomy is the message Moses preached at the end of their 40-year journey in the wilderness. Looking at the Promised Land, Canaan, on the other side of the Jordan River, Moses spoke to the new generation about how they should live in the land they are entering. God’s vision for His people was expressed in his message.

Why was God going to lead Israel into the land of Canaan? Why did God give Israel the law and command them to carry it out strictly? For what purpose did God train Israel in the wilderness for forty years? Why did God deliver Israel from Egypt? Why did God give Israel grace? What was God going to do in the land of Canaan through them?

The word of Christopher Wright answers them very well, “God in his sovereign love has purposed to bring the sinful world of his fallen creation to the redeemed world of his new creation.”¹

He continues, “God seeks the lost, invites the stranger to come on home. ... He does so ... by living in the midst of his own people in such a way that they attract others. ... [a] part of the mission of God’s people is to have God so much at the centre of who they are and what they do, that there is a force, God’s own gravitational pull, that draws people into the sphere of his blessing.”²

God is transforming Israel into a nation of “God in action.”³ People recognize that God is there, God is active and living, and God is available for everyone. There, people experience grace and safety in God’s presence. And, people find hope in hopeless circumstances. Not only that, but they also experience that hope comes true. And, observing their lives, others will join them. This is the vision of God. This is the plan for Israel and for all His redeemed people.

Today, we will look at Deuteronomy and learn the theme “Living for God’s Vision.”

1. A community of “God in action”

1 Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, (Michigan, Zondervan, 2010), 46.

2 *Ibid.*, 129.

3 Alan Andrews, eds., *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, (Colorado Springs, CO., NavPress, 2010), 35, Kindle.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8 NRVs

See, just as the LORD my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy.
⁶ You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!" ⁷ For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?
⁸ And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

The law expresses God's character.⁴ When we observe the law diligently, we demonstrate the character of God. We live in holiness as God is holy. We love others as God loves people. We relate to others with righteousness, justice, and love, as God is righteous, just, and loving. We will see these in more detail later.

Let's look at v.7 again. "For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?"

Please don't be confused that God is with us only while we are praying. Yes, he is with us in our prayer. But, he is with us always, whatever we do, whatever we talk about, whomever we are with, God is with us all the time.

The truth is that we pray to God because we know he is with us. In prayer, we intentionally remember the fact that God is with us. People in Canaan had a different understanding. They thought they needed to get the attention of gods. Because their gods might be busy for something else. Their gods might be on the trip or might be sleeping (cf. 1 King 18:28). Israel's prayer life testified God's presence in them to other nations. And, other nations would see that God listened to their prayers and was answering them. Israel was a community of God in action.

Observing the law shows God's rule, God's reign, God's sovereignty over the nation. Practicing the Sabbath shows it most significantly. They worked six days and rested on the seventh day. So, then, how was their life?

Deuteronomy 2:7 NRVs

⁴ Ibid., 35.

Surely the LORD your God has blessed you in all your undertakings; he knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing.”

By observing the law, Israel experienced God in action. And, they were a living testimony of God in action to other nations.

We must pay attention here. The law shows that God in action is open for everyone.⁵ By observing the law, Israel declared that God in action is not only for Israel but for everyone.

Exodus 20:8-10 NLT

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days a week are set apart for your daily duties and regular work, 10 but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any kind of work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you.

Every Sabbath day, everyone in the community experienced God in action. Regardless of their gender, social status, race, nationality, God is available and He is actively working for everyone.⁶ By observing the law, they experienced it. “What other great nation has rules and regulations as good and fair as this?” (Deut 4:8 MSG)!

2. A community of grace and safety

God was transforming Israel into a nation of God in action. People recognized that God was there, God was active and living, and God was available for everyone. There, people experienced grace and safety in God's presence. The law shows the character of God. When the Israelites observed the law, people experienced grace and safety.

For example, let's look at this. This sounds interesting.

⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁶ Ibid., 32.

Deuteronomy 14:28 NLT

At the end of every third year bring the tithe of all your crops and store it in the nearest town [within your towns (NRSV)].

So, for what? What is the intention of this law? Let's look at the following verse.

Deuteronomy 14:29 NLT

Give it to the Levites, who have no inheritance among you, as well as to the foreigners living among you, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, so they can eat and be satisfied. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all your work.

Simply put, as they did so, those who had lost their financial base would get help to live. The poor would experience God's grace. Those who were weak in society could experience that God lived and worked and helped them. It was not just those who were in difficulty that would experience God. This law was accompanied by the promises of God that says, "God will bless you in all your work." People experienced grace in God's nation.

Deuteronomy 22:1-2 NRSV

You shall not watch your neighbor's ox or sheep straying away and ignore them; you shall take them back to their owner. ² If the owner does not reside near you or you do not know who the owner is, you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until the owner claims it; then you shall return it.

This law brought safety to peoples' lives. They didn't have to worry about losing their precious possessions of cattle and sheep. They didn't have to worry about losing them. If their livestock were found, they would come back to them. Their livestock wouldn't get lost and die. They would be taken care of by someone who had found them. If anyone found sheep that belonged to their family or to people they knew well, they would do this naturally. But they were to do the same even if they found livestock that they didn't know to whom they belonged. As the owners knew their livestock would be taken care of, they could feel at ease and could attend to their other work. Because of the law, people could experience safety in God's nation.

Deuteronomy 19:4-6 NLT

“If someone accidentally kills a neighbor without harboring any previous hatred, the slayer may flee to any of these cities and be safe. ⁵ For example, suppose someone goes into the forest with a neighbor to cut wood. And suppose one of them swings an ax and the ax head flies off the handle, killing the other person. In such cases, the slayer could flee to one of the cities of refuge and be safe. ⁶ If the distance to the nearest city of refuge was too far, an enraged avenger might be able to chase down and kill the person who caused the death. The slayer would die, even though there was no death sentence and the first death had been an accident.

This law only applied when someone accidentally killed another person without any intention of killing the person. This law protected the person who was involved in the accident from an avenger. The family of the deceased person might be upset and hold a grudge against him. They might not listen to him, no matter how much he explained it. They might try to hold him accountable for something he was not responsible for.

But, he would be protected by being in a city of refuge. This law also applied to all people. It was not a special trump card, used only by the privileged. This applied to all people equally. This was where the splendor of the kingdom of God was expressed.

God has a vision, which is to create a community of grace and safety. God transforms people of God into a nation of grace and safety. There, people experience grace and safety in God's presence. People see God in action. People recognize that God is there, God is active and living, and God is available for everyone.

3. A community of hope for the hopeless

Deuteronomy 24:19-22 NLT

“When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all you do. ²⁰ When you beat the olives from your olive trees, don't go over the boughs twice. Leave some of the olives for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. ²¹ This also applies to the grapes in your

vineyard. Do not glean the vines after they are picked, but leave any remaining grapes for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. ²² Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt. That is why I am giving you this command.

When and to whom were these words spoken? To the Israelites. They were looking at Canaan, the Promised Land, on the other side of the Jordan River. Moses spoke to the new generation about how they should live in the Promised Land.

God promised them abundance there. But, some of them were poor. Some of them were weak. Some were marginalized. The law gave them guidelines. They were to be compassionate toward those people because Israel herself received abundantly by God's compassion.

The nation of Israel used to be slaves in Egypt. But the people whom Moses spoke this message to didn't have the experience of being slaves. They didn't have the experience of oppression, torment, and unfair treatment their forefathers had suffered there. So Moses was teaching them, "We Israel had no hope in Egypt, but God had become our hope. It is because of God's mercy that we can now visualize the abundant life in the Promised Land which we are about to enter. It's only by God's mercy that you can have this hope." God was making Israel a nation of hope for the hopeless.

Let's look at one more scripture.

In chapter 28, Moses says that if they obey the word of God, the law, the blessing will come, but if not, the curse will take hold of them. If they do not obey and serve the Lord joyfully and with gladness of heart for the abundance of everything, He will destroy them (Deut 28:47-48). They will be scattered to the ends of the earth (Deut 28:64).

And it goes on like this.

Deuteronomy 30:1-3 NLT

Suppose all these things happen to you --the blessings and the curses I have listed-- and you meditate on them as you are living among the nations to which the LORD your God has exiled you. ² If at that time you return to the LORD your God, and you and your children begin wholeheartedly to obey all the commands I have given you today, ³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes. He

will have mercy on you and gather you back from all the nations where he has scattered you.

God knows their hearts very well and promises this. You will betray me as your fathers did. And I will not leave it unjudged. But that is not the end of it. If you acknowledge your evil deeds, and repent, and turn back to me with all your heart and all your soul, I will receive you. And through your observing my Word with all your heart and all your life, I will restore you. This is amazing! Awesome amazing grace!

God has a vision, which is to create a community of hope for the hopeless. God transforms people of God into a nation of grace and safety. There, people experience grace and safety in God's presence. People experience that God is there, God is active and living, and God is available for everyone. People in that community have experienced hope in hopelessness. Now looking at them, people outside the community recognize that there is hope in hopelessness because God in action is there, actively working in their lives. And God is available for everyone.

4. Living for God's Vision

1 Peter 2:9 NIV

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

This verse clearly shows who we are in Christ and what mission God entrusts to us. Priests serve God (Ex 28:1). They gave sacrifices to God on behalf of people (Lev 1-9). And, they serve people as they teach people the Word and judgment of God (Lev 10:11; Deut 17:11).

Because Jesus offered Himself as an eternal sacrifice for our redemption, we do not need to offer animal sacrifices anymore. But as priests in the New Testament time, in the Holy Spirit Age, we offer ourselves to God (Rom 12:1). We offer the sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15). We give thanks as sacrifice (Col 1:12; Eph 5:20; Ps 50:23). And, there is one more offering that is pleasing to God.

Romans 15:15-16 NIV

I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Proclaiming the gospel is a priestly duty. Our testimony for Jesus, leading people to Christ is an offering pleasing to God.

God first gave us salvation and sent us to the world as examples of salvation, the power of the gospel. We may proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. After we were reconciled with God, we don't just sit there idly in God's grace. We are given the ministry of reconciliation. The message of reconciliation is committed to us (2 Cor 5:18-19).

"Practices show the real meaning of words." We don't just talk about forgiveness and reconciliation. But we will experience them and demonstrate them. We are a letter of Christ (2 Cor 3:3). Christopher Wright says, "Our mission is to make those around us curious about the God we worship and the lives we live." The lives of all Christians should be missional because our God is missional. Our lives have the fragrance of love, the love of God and the love for God because the Spirit of God lives in us and among us.

We started our journey in this series by knowing Jesus as the tree of life. In the last ten weeks, we've come to know him more and our connection with him became stronger. As we are connected with Jesus, the tree of life, each of us has become a branch of the tree. Does it make sense, right? Now you and I are a part of the tree of life. You as God's redeemed people exist as a tree of life in your family, in your school, in your office, in your society, in your country, and in the world.

Our influence may be small at the beginning. People may not recognize it. But, it's fine. As long as you are connected with the tree, Jesus, you will grow gradually. As long as you live as a branch of the tree, you will bear fruits. When, what kind, how, and how many, it depends on God.

Psalm 1:1-3

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ² But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

For self-reflection

1. List up the characters of God you can see in the Law of God.
2. Have you experienced that God led you into an unknown hope through your hopeless situation? Or, do you know someone's story like that?
3. Why is it important to show the meaning of words through actions when we share the good news with others? Think about the other way around: how do you take a word of a person who doesn't live up to what he believes?
4. How do you describe your connection with the tree of life? How would you make it better?
5. Pray and seek what plan God has for you, and write it down.