

God's Treasured Possession

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 January 2017

Preacher: Eric Scott

[0 : 00] Good morning, Watermark. Got all sorts of Lantern Festival flyers up here staring at me on the podium. It's a good reminder.

Happy New Year. We hope to see you at this Lantern Festival celebration. It's going to be a great time, like Chris was saying. Today we're continuing our study of Deuteronomy.

We've been looking at the book of Deuteronomy so far this solar year. And we've been seeing a couple themes that run throughout the book of Deuteronomy. One of these themes is that God shapes his people through his word.

And we've seen God speaking to his people again and again through Moses, giving them his law and shaping them into the people that he wants them to be through his word. And the second theme that we've seen is that the people that God is shaping, he's shaping the Israelites into a people who love him and love others.

And that the laws and the commandments that he gives them are given for the sake of shaping them into this unique people that love God and love others.

[1 : 11] And so today we're going to continue this study of Deuteronomy. We're going to look at blessings in the theme of the Lunar New Year. And we're going to see that God chose his people apart from anything in them meriting his love.

But the proper response to this selection of God is obedience. That God chooses his people apart from anything in them that merits his love.

But his people's proper response is obedience. And we're going to have three steps on this journey. First, we're going to see our effort. Second, we're going to see God's choice.

And third, we're going to see our proper response. That's our effort, God's choice, our proper response. First, our effort.

We as humans have a tendency to try to gain control through our actions. And today's passage starts out with this reminder from Moses.

[2 : 12] He says in verse 7, It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you. For you were the fewest of all peoples. He starts out by telling the Israelites, God didn't choose you because of anything that you did.

In my life, I have a tendency to feel like I need to do things to earn God's favor. I need to be obedient so that God will look at me and be like, Hmm, that Eric Scott, he's a good guy.

I need to be the smartest so that God will think, Yeah, I made a good choice picking him for my team. I need to be the most successful at my work so that God will be proud of me.

And what we see in this verse is that God did not select me because of any of these things about me. There's nothing about me that earns God's approval or God's favor.

God steps in. He tells the Israelites, There's nothing about you that merited my love. In fact, you weren't the biggest. You weren't the strongest.

[3 : 19] You didn't have an army that could beat other nations. You were slaves. Before I could do anything with you, I had to actually go in and rescue you so that you could be free because there was nothing in you that set you apart to make you worthy of my love.

And this desire that Israel probably had to merit God's love, I'm guessing they had a little bit of this desire, which is why Moses reminds them there was nothing about you that merited God's love.

They had this desire. I have this desire. I think it's pretty commonly universal, this desire to merit God's love, to do enough good things, maybe if it's not even for meriting God's love, for at least being in control of the future.

You know, I was doing some research on the history of the New Year traditions in China. And I found this story online. There are several variations of it, but they all sort of come back with several

of the same common elements of how a lot of the celebration of the New Year in China started out. And it starts with the story of a small village in China. And every year on New Year's Eve, this monster called Nian would come and attack the village and eat the villagers.

[4 : 40] And the villagers were living constantly in fear of the monster. And one year, someone had the brilliant idea, hey, what if instead of staying to be eaten by the monster, we ran away this year?

Don't know why they didn't think of that earlier, but they said, let's run to the mountains so that when the monster comes, he won't eat us. And everyone in the village said, yes, that sounds smart. So the whole village is getting ready to leave, but this one older lady in the village said, you know what? I'm old. I'm tired. My husband and my sons have already been eaten by this monster. I have no one left to live for. I have nothing left to live for. I'm too tired to make the journey. I'm just going to stay here. And when the monster comes, he comes.

So the whole village leaves the old lady behind, caring for their elders, you know. They head off to the mountains, and she is alone in the village. And as the sun begins to set, dusk is coming, and she hears a knocking on the doors of the village.

[5 : 50] And the knocking is getting closer, and closer, and closer, and finally, it comes to her house, and she opens the door, and there's an old man standing there.

And he says, I'm a traveler. I've come to your village. I'm looking for a place to stay. And she says, well, you know, everyone ran away, but you can stay with me. So he comes in, and they start talking, and he, she tells him the story of why everyone in the village has run away.

And he says, well, you know what? I happen to know how to deal with this monster. We need to get to work now. So he tells the lady, you need to find everything red in your house.

Put it in all the doors and windows, because the monster is afraid of the color red. And when he comes, and he sees the color red, it will scare him off. Next step, take a mirror, and put it by the front door.

Because when the monster comes, and he looks in the mirror, he will see his reflection, and be terrified, and run away. Third, the monster is afraid of fire.

[6 : 58] So hang a lantern outside your house. Maybe that's part of where the Lantern Festival came from. I didn't research that far. Sorry. Fourth, take a bunch of dried bamboo, and put it in the open area, in the courtyard, in the middle of your house.

And when you hear the monster coming close, light the bamboo on fire. Because dried bamboo makes a crackling noise. And the crackling noise, sort of like firecrackers, will scare away this monster, and he won't attack your house.

So the woman follows all of these instructions, because it's much simpler to do this than to run to the mountains. And the monster comes, and the monster sees the red, and sees itself in the mirror, and sees the fire, and hears the crackling, and gets scared, and runs away.

The next day, all the villagers come back, and they see the lady alive, and they're like, how did you survive? She tells them the story of the old man who came and gave her instructions to fight off the monster.

And the village decided that the old man must have been sent from the gods, and he told her these instructions as a reward for her hospitality. And it struck me that all of these celebrations that go with the Chinese New Year celebration, whether it's the color red, the lanterns, the firecrackers, all of them come with this desire to control our future and stay alive for another year so that the monster doesn't eat us.

[8 : 34] And I know, most of us don't celebrate these things and do these traditions today for this reason, but a reason that they originated is this desire to have control over the future.

And you know, in America, we do things to try to control the future too. When our favorite sports team is playing, we have lucky seats on the couch. We have to be in the exact spot wearing our lucky shirt because if we are not, our team will not win.

And if it's late in the game and we need our team to score, we take our hat and we flip it inside out and stick it at a weird angle on our head because us wearing our hat in a weird way on our couch thousands of miles away from the game affects the way that our team plays on the field.

It's ridiculous, right? But then there are things that we do to try to control our future that aren't quite so ridiculous. Some things we do to try to control our future that are actually good, wise things to do. Like, go get a university education so that we can get the best jobs. Like, going to networking events so that we can meet people and give them our business card.

[9 : 55] I'm sorry, two hands in Hong Kong. So that we can know people so that we can get jobs. And these are good things. But, when we begin to rely on them more than we rely on God for our future, what we're doing is we're grasping, we're trying to take control of our future, trying to do things that merit our success.

And if we can't rest because we need to be at all of the networking events and we can't trust God to provide for us, there's probably a problem in our perspective, in our balance.

And this tendency to try to control the future, I think for me at least, probably for several of us, often has a tendency to flow over into our relationship with God. We try to do things to get God on our side so that he will do good things for us and help us in the future.

And Moses is telling the Israelites at the start of our passage today, that doesn't work. God doesn't do good things for you because you've been successful at doing good things for him.

God didn't choose you because you were great. And I think this is a message that we need to hear and understand today. It's not our efforts and success that make God love us.

[11 : 20] There's nothing in us that is just lovable. It's something else that leads God to love us.

So how do we get to be accepted by God? Point number two, God's choice. God loves us because he chooses to love us.

It's that simple. God loves us because he chooses to love us. In verse eight, Moses says, it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

God didn't choose the Israelites as his people because they were bigger, stronger, better. Again, like we said, they were slaves. They had nothing to offer in and of themselves.

He chose them simply because he wanted them to be his people. That's it. And it works the same way with us today.

[12 : 35] If you're a Christian here today, it's not because you have done something fantastic, but because God wanted to love you. And this is a scary but liberating truth.

Scary because there is nothing that I can do or accomplish to make God love me more or owe me anything. But liberating because there is nothing that I have to do to merit God's love for me.

He gives it to me freely because he wants to. And that sets me free from having to constantly strive and do better and try harder.

I can relax. It's liberating. And when God looks at us and chooses us as his people, look at the change that that makes in our relationship with him.

In verse 6, Moses refers to Israel as God's treasured possession. This word treasured possession is a very special term.

[13 : 47] It's used to refer to a king who has everything. But there's one thing out of everything he has that is especially precious to him.

one thing that even though he has everything, this is the most important. This is the most precious to him.

Maybe you could picture it like, do you guys know the story of the Trojan War? You've got Menelaus, the king of Sparta, and he has this wife, Helen, and his wife gets kidnapped by Paris and taken to the far-off city of Troy.

Now Menelaus, he's a king, he's a wealthy man, he could have his pick of the ladies. All he has to do is go down to the streets and be like you. You look like a good choice.

Come be my new wife and keep on living his life. But he doesn't because his wife is precious to him. And so even though he has everything and he's comfortable in Sparta, he sets off a thousand ships to go and rescue his bride.

[14 : 53] because she is precious to him. And the Bible says that Christians, that the church, are precious to Jesus.

In the New Testament, 1 Peter 2, verse 9, says, But you, talking to the church, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

That God has taken us and made us his own special, treasured possession. That God looks at you and he values you.

You. You know, the thing about a treasure is you can tell how much someone treasures something but what they're willing to give up to get it. If you take something from someone and they're like, oh,

whatever, they didn't actually treasure that.

Even if it's worth is millions of dollars, if they don't care when you take it, they don't actually treasure it. But if they say, I'm willing to give you a huge treasure in exchange for this one thing to get it back, they value it.

[16:17] And the Bible tells us that God was so passionate about creating a people for himself that he was willing to give up his only son to do it.

If you're a parent in here, I want you to just think for a moment. In your head, make a list of the things that you would sacrifice your son or daughter to get.

If you're not a parent, you can still imagine that scenario. Make a mental list of the things that you would sacrifice your son or daughter to get. I think some people are sort of looking at me like, Eric, you're sick.

Why would I sacrifice my son or daughter for anything, right? That's probably a good response. I'm hoping no one has a long list. If you do, Sylvie runs our care ministry.

You might want to get her contact info. But on a more serious note, if you were here and you said, there is literally no scenario in which I would sacrifice my son or daughter for anything, consider this.

[17:28] God sacrificed his only son for you. God literally loves you more than you love anything or anyone.

If you had a list, but it was just like one or two short items, think about what made the list. Maybe it's a person that you really love or a person that you think is worthy.

Consider this. God sacrificed his only son for us when we were his rebellious enemies. There was nothing good in us.

There was nothing worthy in us that would make God say, these people are worth it. He looked at us and he loved us because he loved us and he treasured us so much that he was willing to sacrifice his only son to rescue us and make us a people for his own possession.

If we truly grasp that this week, understand the depth to which God loves us, how will that transform the way that we respond to him this week?

[18:52] And if you're here today and you're not a Christian, the Bible says that God wants you to become a part of his people, that he has sent his son, that he has sacrificed his only son's life to pay the penalty for your rebellion against him.

And he offers you the chance today to become a part of his people, to be a part of his treasured possession. And it doesn't take you doing these heroic feats, it simply takes you believing, trusting in him, and asking him to forgive you for your rebellion against him and to make you part of his people.

And being loved by God in this way, being part of his people, is the greatest blessing possible this Lunar New Year season. So we've seen that our efforts accomplish nothing, but God loves us because he loves us.

But because God loves us, that should lead to a change. That should lead to us having a proper response. Which brings us to point three, our proper response is careful obedience.

If you look down in the passage to verse 11, Moses says, you shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today. Now this may seem like a weird idea.

[20:29] You're not saved by anything that you do, so go do something. I don't know, it just feels weird to me. But the thing about this is our obedience shows where our trust lies.

if you have a little kid and they want to touch the hot stove and you as a parent say don't touch the hot stove and the kid listens and doesn't touch the hot stove, it shows that they trust you.

If they reach out and they're like, ah, they didn't trust you and how do you know they didn't trust you because they didn't obey? You told them this is for your good, this is because I love you that I'm telling you this and their disobedience shows that they don't trust what you're saying and in the same way with God he says I'm giving you these commandments for your good because I love you. Your obedience doesn't earn my love for you but your obedience reveals the fact that you trust me. If you look at verses 9 and 10 it sort of almost seems to point towards this idea that God is judging us based on our actions but if you look closer at the verses you'll see that behind these actions is not just trust but also this idea of love and hate.

God says if you love me you will trust me which will lead to obedience. If you hate me you will not trust me which will lead to disobedience. Our actions on the outside show what is in our heart on the inside.

[22 : 04] Just as God's love for Israel showed itself in him rescuing them from slavery in Egypt and God's love for us showed itself in rescuing us from our slavery to sin through the death of Jesus on the cross.

Our love for God or our love for other people will always show itself in action. Our obedience doesn't merit salvation but it shows the world that our hearts have truly been transformed.

You can think of it this way. This past week millions maybe even hundreds of millions of sons and daughters around the country of China went home to visit their families for the holidays. If you think about the groups of people that went home you can split them into basically two groups.

There's one group who does not love their families. They don't care about spending time with them but they know that if they don't show up at home for this celebration they will be shamed and looked down upon by their family and their village.

There's another group that loves their parents and is excited to go home because they get to spend time with their family and time with their family is precious to them. They both go through the same set of actions.

[23 : 22] They book their tickets on a plane or train. They travel. They take time off from work. They get there to be with their family but once they're with their family their hearts are going to be revealed through their actions.

The ones who don't care about being with their family and are just there to avoid shame will do the bare minimum necessary. They'll show up at the meals but you know what they're going to do when they're at the meals? They're going to sit at the table and be like the ones who love their family are going to go and they're going to prioritize their family they're going to engage in conversations they're going to hear about what's happening in people's lives because they care.

On the one hand you have a group of people who's trying to earn acceptance through their obedience and on the other hand you have a group of people who know at the depth of their being that they are already accepted and that makes them want to do these actions God's saying if you're going through the motions to try and get me to love you it's not going to work I can see your heart I know that your action is not motivated by love but if you understand that I have already loved you that I have accepted you that you are already my people that is good that is what I want and so we look at this and we say okay but what does that look like in real life Moses says in verse 11 you shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today why be careful couldn't you just say like obey and that's enough I think that he says to be careful with obedience because we are careful with things that are important to us if you're doing a science experiment you do it carefully because you don't want to spill acid on yourself or to get wrong results if you're entering a bank transfer you do it carefully because you don't want to send the money to the wrong place or send the wrong amount the money we do things carefully when we care about them and why do we do it carefully one because we understand the consequences of doing it wrong and two we care about the results this is why I'll do even dumb mundane things carefully like with my laundry I'll use some level of care because I don't want my white clothes turning pink I understand the consequences of mixing my laundry wrong in the washing machine and

I care about the results so I'll do it carefully and Moses says that we should obey God carefully I could be wrong but I think for a lot of us we've never thought about this idea of being careful to obey God we sort of assume that when stuff comes up I'll just deal with it I'll try to obey but we take so many other things in life carefully how much more important is obedience to God than my laundry and what is it that keeps us from being careful to obey God I think it's the same two things that make us careful with anything else only the reverse of them we don't understand the consequences of doing it improperly and we don't care about the results I think for a lot of Christians it's easy to believe that salvation is this good benefit and blessing that comes from

[27 : 15] God and then his rules are just sort of like this baggage that comes along with the deal we we think God is really good for saving us and rescuing us but then we have to deal with this other side of him the rules we think we want these blessings and God gives us these rules to keep us from getting these blessings so we act out and disobey because we want blessings that we think God is withholding from us but according to the Bible God's rules are not negative baggage that

comes with an otherwise good deal in following him no God's rules are actually part of the benefit of following him think about it the God who made the world the God who knows how the world works best the God who loves us enough that he is willing to sacrifice his only son to rescue us and save us and wants to give us the best life possible in this world gives us rules for the sake of living the best way possible in the world the problem isn't that

God's rules are bad and withholding from me the problem is that I have a messed up perspective and I don't see the rules as the good gifts that they are here's what I mean I go to a store I see something that I really like and it's really nice I think God says I can't steal but I really want this right now and it would be so simple to just take it and put it in my pocket and walk out of here but God's command not to steal is a good gift given for my blessing because God knows that life in a world where no one has any respect for other people's personal property sucks God wants me to be able to enjoy the benefits of enjoying the things that I have earned through my hard work and if we live in a world where everyone just takes whatever they want from everyone else

I can't do that and even though God's rules may feel restricting in the short term right now in the long term they benefit me and help me to live the best life possible his rules commandments are a positive gift from him they're a good gift that he gives to help us to live the best way possible they're part of his blessing to us and that's why it's important to be careful to obey because God gives us his rules for our good and for our benefit so what does it look like to be careful to obey well when we're careful to do things we usually plan them out in advance so one thing we can do is think through in the coming week what are the ways that I will be tempted in a way that will actually make me feel like oh maybe

I should give in to this temptation is it possible for us to plan ahead now so that either if there's a situation where we know we will be tempted but we don't need to be in that situation we can avoid being in the tempting situation or is it possible for us to work on thinking through our response now so that when the moment comes we don't need to make up a response in the spot because when I don't know about you but for me when temptation comes if I've thought it through and I know how I should respond in advance it's much easier to respond properly so planning in advance of how we're going to obey God how we're going to resist temptation when it comes up this week is an important step of being careful to obey think about it when it comes to planning for retirement so many of us plan for every conceivable thing that could go wrong how much more important is our obedience to

God than our retirement account if it's true what the Bible says that our relationship with God impacts eternity billions and billions of years in the future shouldn't we put at least the same amount of effort into preparing for that that we do for planning the last 20 years of our lives here on earth a second step that can help us be careful to obey is finding people who can hold us accountable you know when I'm entering in a bank transfer if she's around I'll ask Justine to help me out and I'll type in the number and then I'll hand her the number and have her read it out to me so that I can look at it on the screen and make sure the numbers match because I don't want to get the number wrong because it's important to me and having a second person can help me get it right a second person who can see look at what I'm doing and tell me if they see something that looks wrong to them and in the same way we often have blind spots in our lives to where we are disobeying

[32 : 39] God and having a second person who can come in who can look at situations that we're in and give a second perspective can be hugely helpful in pointing us in the right direction of obedience so giving people permission to get to know you on a deep level to ask difficult maybe even sometimes awkward questions is a huge step in being careful to obey and not just saying this at the start and shutting them up whenever they actually start to call you out on stuff but listening to what they say considering how you need to change in response to God because Moses tells us in this passage obedience to God is important if we want to follow him and respond properly to the love that he has shown to us it takes a certain level of maybe we even say effort on our part someone once said

God is not opposed to effort he is opposed to earning it's not effort for the sake of trying to make him love us but it's effort to give the right response for the love that he's already shown us so as you think about it where are the areas in your life this coming week that you need to be careful in your obedience to God the reality is that if you're here today and you're a Christian you have been chosen by God not because of anything good in you but simply because he loves you the proper response to this love from God is our careful obedience again if you're here today and you're not a

Christian God wants to make you a part of his family a part of his people today this relationship with God is the greatest blessing available today or any day so what we're going to do is we're going to have the band come back up on stage and we're going to close in prayer but then after we pray the band is just going to play instrumentally for a minute and

I want you to take a minute to think to yourself what is the one thing from today's sermon that I need to take away and remember this week maybe even write it down on a piece of paper so you can have it to remember later on and then when service finishes find someone and share that with them because the act of telling it to someone else helps us remember it and helps us be more likely to remember it and do it throughout this week so let's pray and then we'll reflect father we thank you for your great love for us we thank you for the new year and this new chance to reflect on the ways that you have blessed us even when we were so undeserving we pray that we would with careful obedience not for the sake of trying to make you love us but for the sake of showing our love for you I pray that we would be people who love you and love others that are shaped by your word a people who know you people who trust you and a people whose love for you and trust for you is shown in our actions towards one another and towards the world around us

God we thank you that you're good we thank you that you love us so extravagantly and immensely in Jesus name amen