

## Hope PCA Sermon September 8, 2024

### *“This Is the Law — for You” (Deuteronomy 4:44 – 5:5)*

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Our text for this morning, continuing in Deuteronomy, begins in Deuteronomy 4 and ends in Deuteronomy 5. We'll pick it up at Deuteronomy 44 and we'll go through verse 5 of Deuteronomy 5. We're making a transition here in this book, and I will talk about that as we get into it. If you're able, please stand as we honor God's Word and its public reading here this morning. So Deuteronomy 4.44–5.5. This is the very living Word of our living God.

*<sup>44</sup> This is the law that Moses set before the people of Israel. <sup>45</sup> These are the testimonies, the statutes, and the rules, which Moses spoke to the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt, <sup>46</sup> beyond the Jordan in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon, whom Moses and the people of Israel defeated when they came out of Egypt. <sup>47</sup> And they took possession of his land and the land of Og, the king of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites, who lived to the east beyond the Jordan; <sup>48</sup> from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Valley of the Arnon, as far as Mount Sirion (that is, Hermon), <sup>49</sup> together with all the Arabah on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, under the slopes of Pisgah.*

*<sup>1</sup> And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. <sup>2</sup> The Lord our God made a covenant with u in Horeb. <sup>3</sup> Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. <sup>4</sup> The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, <sup>5</sup> while I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord. For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of the Lord indeed endures forever. May he bless it this morning to our understanding and to our living. Please be seated and let me pray for us as we come to the Word.

Oh God, you have promised that your Word goes out and does not return to you empty, but instead accomplishes all that you purpose for it and is successful in the very things for which you send it out. We trust, oh Lord, that that is true even this morning as your Word goes out. May it go out, may it be faithful, may it be true. Instruct us, teach us, guide us, lead us, increase our faith, oh Lord, that we might give you praise and honor and live as your people. We pray it in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

There's a relatively new book out by a man named Harrison Perkins called “Reformed Covenant Theology, a Systematic Introduction”. In the book, he talks about a high school assignment (quote): “In years long past, remember that, because for some of us, those years weren't that long past.” That's about a high school assignment, in years long past, where students had to take care of a boiled egg for a week. Anybody remember doing that? Had to take care of a boiled egg for a week? Nobody? Maybe that was a California thing. No, I did it

here. Why would they give this assignment to high school kids? Well, to experience taking care of something fragile, something delicate. It was meant to be a stand-in, an analog, for a baby. Now, was that a good lesson? Did it really teach us anything? And really, how does that relate to God's covenant relationship with His people, and in particular to God's law? Well, we're going to come to that. But I wanted to plant that little illustration in your head so you can noodle on it for a little while in the back of your mind. Let it percolate there. Why would this author bring up this example in a book about the law, in a book about covenant?

Well, the verses before us this morning kind of once again summarize Israel's recent history. But they also serve as an introduction by Moses into his very long exposition, his explanation of God's law for Israel through so many of the chapters of Deuteronomy. So most commentators look at these verses as the beginning of Moses' second speech to the people of Israel. I want to talk about how it summarizes, how it introduces briefly this morning, but because it is the transition and the gateway, if you will, into talking about God's law, beginning with the Ten Commandments right here in chapter 5, I think it's worthwhile to spend some time reminding ourselves about God's law, how to think about that law, what kinds of laws are there, and what purposes God has in giving us that law. And then come back to the idea at the end, how is this relevant for us today?

Well, first the summary and the introduction. Verses 44 through 49 (if you go back and look at chapter 1 verses 1 to 5), 44 to 49 kind of repeat basically the same content, the same information, the same ideas. Where is Israel at geographically, locationally? Who they have just conquered? There they are east of the Jordan River, they've conquered the kings Sihon and Og, they've taken their territory, they've devoted it to destruction, and it's been allocated to a couple of the tribes. Moses also repeats at least the same kind of language, what he said before. Chapter 1 verse 1, if you go back and take a look at it, it opens very clearly: "These are the words that Moses spoke to Israel." These are the words that Moses spoke. Now, chapter 44: "*This is the law that Moses set before the people of Israel.*" There's a similar idea going on here. Moses is speaking. This is the law. "*These are the testimonies, the statutes, the rules which Moses spoke*" in verse 45 to the people. That introduction back at the beginning is very broad. Moses is laying out before Israel the covenant that they have with the Lord God, which is reflected in the book of Deuteronomy.

But now things are getting more specific. This is the part of that covenant that lays out its stipulations, its requirements for God's people. If you remember the structure that we talked about, about suzerainty treaties, old ancient covenants, we're done with the part that's called the historical prologue that remembers and describes the relationship between the great king and the lesser king and his people. Now we're moving into the laws themselves, the requirements, the obligations. If you don't have that outlined, there's some more out on the back table in the foyer. Now we're getting into the legal meat of the covenant relationship between God and his people. What are they to do? What are they not to do? But there's also (if you heard it, maybe you did), we've heard this before, not just in verses 1-5, but we also had a long description in the intervening chapters of how Israel went out and conquered these two kings, took their territory, how it was allocated.

So three times now, in the first four chapters, Moses has reminded the people of Israel where they've just been and what's just happened and where they are. Why would he do that? Well, we know repetition in the Bible matters. When the Bible repeats things, it does it for a reason. This is an emphasis. It's something that we're supposed to pay attention to. And I think what Moses is getting at, and God through Moses, to them and to us today, is here again is Israel, east of the Jordan River, poised to enter into the promised land. A generation ago they were afraid: "These people are too tall, they're giants. They'll kill our children. Their walls, their cities are too high for us." They were afraid. Could that fear consume Israel again? Well, humanly-speaking, of course. Those people of those cities are still there. But remember, the tall king that had the iron bed that God killed for the people of Israel? God is reminding them, "Look what I have done for you already. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Get it in your head. Get it in your heart. I have given you land already. Remember what I've already done." And so he's encouraging them: "Go forth, go forth in faith. What has been done will be done again. Take heart, Israel. Trust in God. Keep his commandments."

And then moving into chapter 5, Moses introduces what's going to follow. And he's calling upon Israel to pay attention. Herman Ritterbaugh sees a couple of different references here. The broader term "law" that's used in verse 44, he thinks, reverts to chapters 5 through 11, and the more detailed words or synonyms, "testimony", "statutes", and "rules" in verse 45 and chapter 5 verse 1, as anticipating the more detailed sections starting in chapter 12 and following. Now I wanted to say, one of the temptations is to read verse 45, "statutes, rules, testimonies", we hear other, "precepts" is a word that's used in Psalm 119 and elsewhere. Our task is not to say which one is a statute, which one is a precept, which one is a rule. These are synonyms that are building one upon the other to, again, make us realize the breadth and the depth, the comprehensive law of God for all of life.

And in reminding Israel of these things, Moses issues a call to them, "*Hear*". He summons them, "Hear," he says, "hear what I'm going to say. Learn these things and be careful to do all of the laws, testimonies, statutes, and rules that you are about to receive." Hear, learn, do. God's law isn't just out there as a thing. You ever see a lawyer interviewed on TV and behind them there's these shelves, reams of shelves of law, case law, studies. God's law is not on a shelf somewhere to be referred to if we need it. Hear it, learn it, do it. It's something to be discovered, to be studied. It's meant to be near to God's people. So "*Hear*," Moses says. That's the typical call used in Scripture to pay attention. "Behold! What follows is important." It's in the fundamental confession of faith of the Jewish people: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Pay attention. Learn. Don't just hear it. What are we told in the New Testament? "Don't be hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word as well." So go deeper. This isn't mere knowledge of what the laws are, but learning why they matter, and learning how to apply them in day-to-day life. And then, only then, can Israel, or even us today, be careful to do them. We need to hear them, we need to learn them, and then indeed we can do them. It's a personal, deliberate pursuit of a deeper understanding and a careful application of a new and different way of living. That's what we're being called to, a different kind of people.

So a recap and then a call that introduces what comes next in chapter 5. Now I do want to talk as well about types of laws and why they're given to us. We've talked about this already, and you may remember it's in the Deuteronomy outline that is available. Why repeat it? Why

talk about types of law and uses of law? Well, because God's law is repeating it right now. God's Word is repeating it. I think it's proper to think about these things again. It's worth reminding ourselves of them because we're about to enter into a long section of Deuteronomy where Moses gives us the law. What is that law? Why has it been given? And it's helpful for us to know these things. And we're going to be talking about them as we go through these sections. What kind of law is this? For what purpose did God give it? We need to ask those questions or it just becomes a litany of things that we go, "I don't know." And that's not the kind of people we need to be.

So we've talked about types of law before: civil laws, ceremonial laws, moral law. We've talked about how the law is to be used, or the purposes for which it is given. Again, different theologians number them differently. First of all, to drive us to our need for someone to keep the law on our behalf, because I can't do it, to provide an example for what kinds of laws nations and peoples should have, and then thirdly, to teach God's people how to live, especially those of us today, in gratitude and thanksgiving for what he's done.

So types of laws, civil laws, laws governing the political and legal life of Israel, how to sell, how to buy, weights and measures, property boundaries. If there's an issue to be decided, how many witnesses does it take? What happens if there's a crime committed? What penalty needs to be paid to what degree and how do you decide that? What about debts that people owe? How are those to be paid off or how are they to be forgiven? How does Israel function as a civil society? When we see those laws, we'll ask certain questions about them.

Ceremonial laws, laws given that govern the worship of Israel. They are God's people. They are to serve him and to worship him, to obey him. So how do you do that? What kind of sacrifices? How is the tabernacle or temple set up? What are the sacrifices and feasts for? Who's to go? When? How? What is done? Rules for the priests and Levites to follow.

And moral laws, ethical laws that reflect what is holy, that distinguish between right and wrong, what is good, what is wicked, that moral law summarized, as we talked about just this morning, in the Ten Commandments. And again, we talked about this before, every law has a moral component to it, because every law is a reflection of a holy God and in some way reveals to us his character, his desires, what is good and holy and righteous. We'll talk about those kinds of things as well. When we come across these ceremonial laws or these civil laws, is there a moral principle there? All the law is supposed to tie back to the Ten Commandments. How does this law tie back to one or more of the Ten Commandments? And what does that mean for us? What can we learn from it? Who we want to be careful to attend to those things, or we'll just get lost in a bunch of do's and don'ts, which has the danger of becoming legalism, and we're not going to go there.

And there's a purpose to God's law, uses to which God's law are put. God intends something to happen as he gives his law to have an effect upon us. The first use of the law that we talk about (again, sometimes people number these differently), but it's that idea of making us realize how incapable we are of doing these things. "I cannot keep this law. Who can rescue me from this body of death? Who can help me? Who can save me? I need someone to stand in for me, a substitute." It's to make us realize that the promise of the seed of the woman in

Genesis 3, the seed of Abraham, the son of David, is that promised one who will stand in and do what is needed for us. And indeed came and did just that. "He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God" (Galatians 3:24 and 25 again). So then the law is our guardian or tutor until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. That first use of the law accuses us of sin, condemns us of our sin, reveals our guilt before God, drives us to seek out that mediator, that advocate, that substitute. And of course we have that in Christ Jesus.

A second use of the law, the law instructs all of humanity in what is right and what is wrong. We pray for leaders in our country, local leaders, state, national, to be those who at least recognize (even if they're not believers in Christ), at least recognize the goodness of this law, its wisdom, and use it as a model for how they might govern us as citizens. We were told that these laws for Israel would result in the Israelites being envied among all the other nations for the wisdom and the holiness of its laws. Who has a God like Israel? Who has such wise and holy laws that surrounding nations would proclaim?

And then that third use of the law that again is given to us as believers that shows us how we're to live. What we're to believe, how to talk, how to walk in grateful obedience to God is saving work for us in Christ Jesus. All those imperatives in the New Testament flow out of what's already been done for us in Christ. That's why that comes first almost always in Paul's letters. Who you are in Christ, what's been done, what's been accomplished. Now in gratitude and thanksgiving, live this way.

So again, fair warning, we're going to hear a lot about this as we go through Deuteronomy. Why did God give this or that law? What purpose does it serve? How does it fit? And I think that will open up to us the relevance of God's law for us today, given to Israel thousands of years ago, but still relevant for how we live our lives today. We're not just studying history. This is real. This is relevant. We're learning about God. We're learning about his holy character. We're learning about his law. And we're learning about what it means for us, because it does mean something for us.

So what about those boiled eggs percolating in the background of your brain? How does that apply to us? Why would an author bring that up? Well, again, we did this in high school. We all thought it was pretty silly, but we did it because we were told to. And there were penalties if we didn't. Carried around a boiled egg for, I don't know, it was a week, maybe two. You had to have it with you all the time. You couldn't lose it. If you lose it, you fail. If it falls and cracks, you fail. If something worse happens, I guess you fail even worse. I'm not quite sure. Don't let it get cracked. Don't let it be lost. I think my kids, when they were in high school, had actual dolls that simulated real babies that cried and ate and messed up their diaper. But we had eggs. That's what we had all those years ago.

What was the point? Well, supposedly it was, again, to teach us about how difficult it is to take care of something that's so delicate and fragile, that being the parent of a baby takes a lot of time and attention. You can't just leave it and go do something. It's with you. You have to take care of it. You have to provide for its needs. Also implied in there was the idea that if you can be responsible with this, maybe, maybe you can learn to responsibly take care of

something much, much more important, the life of a little child, a little baby. But then there's the flip side of that. If you can't take care of a hard-boiled egg, maybe you can't be trusted with a little child. I think it was also meant to warn us, you know, "Don't do something stupid and get a child while you're still a teenager."

Were those lessons valid? Did we really learn them? I don't know. It seemed a stretch then, still seems like a stretch to me today. Nevertheless, there's a principle there, and Harrison Perkins brings it up in his book on covenant theology. And he ties it to one of the uses of the law: the use that teaches us about our need for a savior. And in particular, he said, here's the similarity. Israel's ability (or in reality its inability) to keep God's law, and in keeping that law, keep possession of the land, is an object lesson for us. Just as he had with the lands east of the Jordan, God is going to go before Israel and give them the promised land. That's what Joshua is all about.

But there was also clarity in God's law. We've already seen a hint of it in chapter 4, that maintaining possession of the land, once God has given it to them, depended upon Israel's continued obedience to the law. If they chased after other gods, they would be evicted from the land, exiled. That's exactly what happened. In fact, there's, I think, a strong hint, if not a reality, that Moses in Deuteronomy twice doesn't just warn Israel that this might happen, but basically prophesies that it indeed will happen. So what's the lesson? Well, for Israel, "If you can't keep possession of a chunk of land because you can't keep God's law, how can you possibly think, how could you imagine, that you could earn possession of or citizenship in God's heavenly eternal kingdom, which is much greater, glorious, permanent, eternal?"

And of course, that's not just a lesson for Israel, that's a lesson for us. Dr. Perkins puts it this way (page 325 of the book): Israel's inability to keep the merely earthly dwelling by the covenant's demands for obedience teaches us all how our works then are certainly not adequate to obtain life and heavenly blessing. If Israel couldn't keep the law to maintain a patch of ground in the Middle East, it's far more presumptuous to think that by our own obedience, we could merit life in God's heavenly kingdom. We need something else. We need Someone else to do it for us. Of course, that's the lesson we've been learning on Tuesday nights from Paul's letter to the Galatians. Salvation does not come by works. It cannot come by works. It must come by faith and by faith alone. Israel's been told, "Trust God to take the possession of the land for you." Again, that repetition three times. The Lord has done this for you. He took possession of these territories east of the Jordan. Trust him to take possession of the promised land for you. He will do it for you. When Israel tries to do it themselves, they fail. It's like the Monty Python scene: "Run away! Run away!". You can't do it.

And if that's a lesson to Israel, then there's a lesson for all of humanity as well. You must trust God to save you because you can't do it yourself. Can't be done. And that's, of course, what God has done just as he went before Israel, gave them possession of the promised land for us. He sent his Son, his only Son, to live and to die, to be resurrected from death, to ascend into heaven for us and for our salvation. The only human being who ever kept God's law perfectly. That's the law-keeper that we need. That's the law-keeper that the law points to. The One who willingly went to the cross, suffered God's judgment, experienced his wrath — not for his sin (for he had none), but for our sins. "The record of our sins that was nailed to the cross,"

says Paul in Colossians. "He was made sin who knew no sin." But showing his acceptance of that work, he was raised from death to life, ascended to heaven to God's right hand where he sits today and makes intercession for his people. We have the hope of following him there. Hebrews describes him as the forerunner who's gone ahead, almost like a scout, you know, taking people through the Appalachians or through the West. He leads the way behind the curtain to that eternal heavenly home because our sins are forgiven in him. His righteousness, his obedience is now counted as ours. God did it for the Israelites. He did it for every person who comes to him in repentance and faith in Christ Jesus. He does it for us. It's a hope that goes out to all the people of the world, expressed in the message of the gospel.

There's a fascinating little element of this passage in chapter 5 verses 3 and 4. Moses says, "*Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. The Lord spoke with you face to face* (personally, is what that means) *at the mountain, out of the midst of fire.*" You know what's going on there? Were any of those people alive 40 years ago at the mountain? Maybe, some of them as children. But when we think of God speaking at the mountain, we think of that faithless generation who were judged to wander and to die in the wilderness. Moses is saying, "He spoke to you. He spoke to you."

What's he getting at? Well, we've talked about this before, one of the themes of Deuteronomy: the unity of the people of God, the unity of the nation of Israel. They fight together, even though the lands are allocated tribe by tribe, they fight together. They're in it together. They cross the Jordan together to conquer. And what Moses is also doing here is saying that all generations of the people of Israel through all time are tied together. Notice how it starts in verse 3: "*Not with our fathers, not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant.*" You know who he's talking about there? It's not that older generation that died away. In Deuteronomy, almost all the time when it speaks of their fathers, it's referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses is saying, "Not with them did God make this covenant. Not with you did he give these laws and precepts that are full of wisdom and life." Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the patriarchs, all their forefathers. The covenant, therefore, stretches back to the promises that God made to those men, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. "The promises given to them are now fulfilled in you", is what Moses is saying. It's all one covenant, one covenant of grace, the fulfillment of God's promises, extended as it's revealed through time.

What that means more broadly is there's no separation among the people of God. There's no Israel and Christians, as Paul describes it. We are wild branches grafted into the tree that is Israel. We are one people. There is one covenant of grace. There is one means of salvation: repentance and faith coming to God, either in the promise of the seed that would come or in recognition that he has come and done a great work for us. "*The Lord*", he says to them, "*spoke with you.*" And what I would say, I think by extension, is the Lord is still speaking, isn't he? The Lord is speaking to you. He's speaking to me in these laws, these commandments.

So we can take to heart Moses' call to the people of Israel as our own call. As we begin this long extended journey through God's law, hear them, learn them, be careful to do them. And Moses, I think through time, or God through Moses, is speaking to us. You hear them. You learn them. You do them. We don't do them to earn God's favor. We already have it in Christ. We don't do it to possess, again, a chunk of land in the Middle East somewhere. Or to earn

blessings of health or wealth or prosperity. We do it because we are God's people, bought with a precious price of Christ's own blood. And we see these laws as a beautiful reflection of the holiness of God, of his glory, of his beauty. And in them, a precious reminder of what God has done to save us in Christ Jesus. Because when we hear about these laws, we're really hearing about Jesus. He's behind them. When we learn these laws, we're learning about Jesus. When we do these laws, we're following in the footsteps of Jesus. Israel could boast, but can we not boast even more? Can we not with awe and wonder say, "Who has a God like us? Who has a god like us? Who has such wise and holy laws and instructions as we do? Who has a savior like our Savior?"

This is the law. These are the testimonies, the statutes, the rules. My friends, how blessed, how blessed are we to have them. How blessed are we to have Deuteronomy. How blessed are we to have, more importantly, God's own Son, Christ Jesus, as our Savior.

Let's pray.

God and Father, we do want to see your beauty and your holiness, your goodness in these laws. As we study them, Lord, do not let them become a yoke of obligation or duty or law-keeping around our necks that would bind us in a way that would cause us to think we might earn your favor in the keeping of them. But help us to remember we have a Savior who kept these laws for us. paid the penalty that we deserve for not keeping them. And now we can see them in a whole new light for their beauty, for their goodness, for their wisdom, for their holiness. Help us, O Lord, again, as we go through these things. Teach us, guide us, and lead us. May we learn from them. May we learn what effect and what meaning they have for us today. May we be wise in applying those things in our lives, individually and as your people here at Hope. We pray it in the precious, wonderful, matchless name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

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