

Deuteronomy 5:23 – 28

Words Well Spoken

...they have well said all that they have spoken – v. 28

More often than not the Lord spoke to Moses with words of condemnation for the Israelites. Their unbelief and their grumbling and complaining, to say nothing of their plots to kill Moses and return to Egypt eventually sorely tried the patience of the Lord. We learn from their example of unfaithfulness and unbelief that the Lord can be pressed so as to lose His patience when it comes to unbelief and sin.

More than once the Lord instructed Moses to step aside, so to speak, and allow the Lord to destroy the Israelites. More than once the Lord said in effect to Moses – *let's start over. I'll make of thee a great nation.* And in each instance Moses would intercede for the Israelites. It's interesting to note just how he interceded. The basis for his intercession had to do with God's honor and with God's reputation. Moses was concerned about what the surrounding nations would think if God didn't see His purpose through and bring the Israelites into Canaan. So we find a typical specimen of Moses intercession in Num. 14:15-19:

15 Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,

16 Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

17 And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,

18 The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

19 Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

And in faithfulness to His covenant, as well as in answer to the prayer of Moses, God would spare the Israelites yet again and they would press on until the next extremity would launch them through the same cycle again.

In the words of our text, however, we find something that stands in stark contrast to what would be the usual order of things in the course of the Israelites wilderness wanderings. In this portion of Deuteronomy Moses is reflecting on the time when the Lord descended upon Mt. Sinai in the thickness of a cloud. The mountain quaked and was on fire and the voice of the Lord was exceeding loud. This revelation of God in His majestic splendor and awesome power set everyone in the camp of the Israelites trembling with great fear.

There's a detail to this historic event that is supplied for us in the epistle to the Hebrews that you don't find in the narrative of the Old Testament. It's the response of Moses

himself to the Lord descending upon Mt. Sinai. In Heb 12:21 *And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.*

What was true of Moses was true of them all. They were afraid. And in the context of that fear Moses recounts to them how the elders and heads of the tribes had approached Moses and begged him to spare them from such a terrible experience of the Lord descending in His glory and making His voice heard.

25 Now therefore why should we die? – they ask in v. 25 for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die.

26 For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?

They have a suggestion about this fearful circumstance. Instead of them having to bear what they cannot bear – *go thou near*, they say to Moses in v. 27 *and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.*

It was with reference to this suggestion that Moses recounts how the Lord had heard their words – and not only heard their words but commended them for their words. There's the contrast to what becomes the typical scene in the wilderness narrative. The typical scene is the Lord condemning the Israelites for their sin or their unbelief. In contrast to that now we find the Lord commending the Israelites for their words.

Listen again to v. 28 – *And the LORD heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the LORD said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.*

How often do we find the Israelites receiving such commendation from God? – *they have well said all that they have spoken.* I would like to look at the words which the Israelites spoke that gained them this commendation from God. I think you'll discover that the need they recognized and the desire they expressed are very appropriate for us as we meet around the Lord's table.

Words well spoken, then, is our theme:

They have well said all that they have spoken

Consider with me first of all that in these words:

I. We Find the Recognition of the Contrast Between God and Man

The narrative indicates quite plainly that this revelation of God in His glory was more than the Israelites could bear. *Why should we die?* – they ask in v. 25. *Who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?* – they ask in v. 26.

It seems that they had learned their theology well and not just in the form of a catechism lesson but through experience which is always the best teacher when it comes to theology. The uniform testimony of all the scripture is that when God draws near in His glory men learn immediately that God is unapproachable.

With reference to Christ being that blessed and only Potentate – the King of kings and Lord of lords Paul writes in 1Tim. 6:16 *Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom [be] honour and power everlasting. Amen.*

The Psalmist makes reference to Him covering Himself with the light. *Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment* (Ps. 104:2). And so we're taught that the blinding revelation of His glory is but the covering of His glory.

Moses was allowed to see what amounted to the after glow of His glory when the Lord brought him into the mount and caused His glory and goodness to pass by him. This is the meaning of Exod. 33:23 where the Lord says to Moses *I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.* This was but a partial revelation of the glory of the Lord – and even that partial revelation was enough to cause Moses face to glow when he descended from the mount.

Habakkuk makes reference to what amounts to the hiding of His power. Listen to what he says beginning in Hab. 3:3

3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

4 And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.

5 Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.

6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

The driving asunder of the nations – the scattering of the mountains – the bowing of the hills – these are in comparison to the fullness of His power but the hiding of His power. If, then, the blinding light of His glory is but the covering of His glory and if the scattering of the mountains amounts to the hiding of His power – then the lessons clearly stands out in scripture that there is no way that we can overestimate His greatness. Quite the contrary – we constantly commit the sin of underestimating His greatness – but there is no way His greatness can be overestimated.

The quaking of Mt. Sinai, then, as well as the voice of the trumpet sounding long and growing louder – the thick cloud upon the mount and the fire that descended upon it amounted to the hiding of God's glory. There was also in the course of this revelation an emphasis on the truth that God is unapproachable.

Moses was confident that every precaution had been taken to keep the people back. So when the Lord spoke to him in Exod. 19:21 telling him to *Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish* – Moses responded by saying *The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.*

This, however, would not do – and so the Lord says to Moses in the next verse (v. 24) *Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them.*

You see the emphasis, then, on God being unapproachable. The contrast is great between His holiness and our sinfulness – but even apart from sin His glory cannot be comprehended. The very angels of heaven must cover their faces with their wings when they sing of His holiness (Isa. 6). The stars in their brightness are not pure in His sight (Job. 25:5); the heavens themselves are not clean before Him (Job 15:15).

All of these things indicate to us that if God is approached at all – He must be approached only as He Himself directs. And I can't help but feel that if there was a greater knowledge and appreciation for the greatness of His glory there would be no such thing as what has become common place today – which is to approach Him loosely or casually – or to approach Him in any way we see fit. Those that worship Him in this fashion, I'm afraid, manifest their ignorance of Him.

The Israelites were certainly not ignorant of His glory when the Lord descended upon Mt. Sinai. And it's no wonder, therefore, that the Israelites marveled that they had seen a measure of God's glory and had heard His voice out of the midst of the fire and yet they still lived (v. 24). They perceived that the situation was quite beyond their capacity to endure and as a result they were commended by God for the words they spoke. May we gain the wisdom this day that they possessed in our recognition of the glory of Christ. If we do gain it – then we'll certainly be moved to approach God humbly with reverence and godly fear.

They have well said all that they have spoken – God said of them. Underlying what they spoke was their realization of the greatness of their God. But what about the words themselves? What did they speak? They made a very specific request and so we must consider next that not only did their words recognize the contrast between God and man but

II. We also Hear the Desire Expressed for a Mediator

The Israelites were not so foolish as the Gadarenes in the gospel of Mark who upon seeing the demonstration of the glory of Christ's power over demons requested that He permanently depart from their coasts (Mk. 5:17). The Israelites – rather than request that God simply leave them alone – instead requested that Moses continue to draw near to God.

Go thou near they say in v. 27 and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee...

Twice in this verse they refer to God as *the LORD our God*. They have no desire to disown Him – they only desire a way to commune with Him that they can endure. In other words they desire that Moses become their mediator – their go-between, if you will. And for this desire the Lord commends them. A way could be initiated in which the Lord would be their God and they would be His people – a mediator was a perfect solution to the problem.

In this respect, then, Moses points us to Christ. Moses was just like them in so far as he was human. He was approachable. He was aware of their infirmities. They could discourse with him. The desire the Israelites expressed for a mediator was the same desire that Job expressed.

Job had a very high view of God – and yet Job still desired to commune with God. He saw the futility of trying to take his case to the one who alone had spread out the heavens and treaded upon the waves of the sea (Job 9:8). And so he lamented in v. 32:

32 For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment.

33 Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.

This idea of a *daysman* is the same idea and desire that the Israelites express when they ask Moses to go near and hear what God would say and then convey to them God's word. It's the same desire that any man would have who desired to worship God and commune with God without being consumed by God's glory.

We know, of course, that Christ is that Mediator. 1Ti. 2:5 *For [there is] one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*. The elements of this communion feast serve the specific purpose of reminding us that Christ is that mediator. Here then is the way we can worship God and walk with God and commune with God. Here is the way that we can even behold the glory of God – *the word was made flesh* (Jn. 1:14) *and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

There is, of course, a limiting factor to Moses. I think you could say that Moses represented primarily only one of the offices of Christ as our mediator. Moses would represent that prophetic office of Christ. The design of this office would be to declare to the Israelites all that God would declare to Moses. This was what a prophet did.

Having said that, however, we need to also recognize that most of what God would declare to Moses would pertain to the priestly office of the mediator. Moses would be called up into the mount, you see, and from there the Lord would convey to him that system of worship that would be largely made up of animal sacrifices.

There would be the burnt offering, the sin offering, the peace offering. There would be the day of Passover and the day of atonement to name but a couple of those religious feasts

that would require sacrifices. And these sacrifices, we know, would point the Israelites to Christ. And so it's true to say that the substance of Moses prophetic ministry was to convey what would one day be the priestly ministry of Christ. Listen to the words of Heb 9:15 *And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions [that were] under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*

And Heb 12:24 that tells us we have come to Mt. Zion *And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than [that of] Abel.*

With Moses functioning as their mediator the Israelites would learn how to approach God on the basis of substitutionary sacrifice. We know, of course, that Christ is greater than Moses. We know that Christ is our prophet, priest, and king. And we know that He executes the office of a priest in His once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us. (S.Cat. #25).

In these elements, then, we behold His glory. We behold His glory without the fear and trembling of the Israelites at Mt. Sinai – but we also behold His glory in the same reverential awe. For in these elements we learn that One who was unapproachable is now approachable. We learn that there is a meritorious basis for our worship and service through the broken body and shed blood of Christ, the lamb of God.

We learn or are reminded that the enmity that stood between us and God which barred the way from ever approaching God has been removed and removed at a very high price – even the broken body and shed blood of that One who is the only mediator between God and man.

What a blessing, then, to come into the very throne-room of heaven because we have a forerunner there who has gone before us. What a blessing to come openly, to come freely, to come boldly because there is One there who is our advocate and whose merit in His life and death has opened the way for us to approach Him whose glory made Him unapproachable.

Do you see why God commended the Israelites for their words? *They have well said all that they have spoken.* Their words were well spoken because they reflected the truth that God in His glory is unapproachable by sinful man. Their words were well spoken because they set forth the right solution for their need which was the need for a mediator. Consider finally, that their words were well spoken because in those words:

III. We See the Proper Pledge for Obedience

When the Israelites asked Moses to be their mediator they further added in v. 27 *and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.*

There was a willingness to obey on the part of the Israelites should their petition for Moses to become their mediator be granted. This would be a great manifestation of grace if their request was granted and Moses would be their mediator. This would take away the terrifying elements of their experience of God that they could not endure. We find here, then, a clear indication that grace should lead to obedience.

Recognizing as we do – that we have a mediator in Christ – that we have a mediator who has reconciled us to God by His shed blood – that we have a mediator who by His life and death has met every obligation for us pertaining to the covenant of works and has removed from us the dread of condemnation – we should, likewise be compelled to pledge our obedience to God.

Verse 29 contains a rather sad and ironic statement. The Lord in that verse says *O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!* There is in these words the recognition that proper obedience can only be rendered by a proper frame of heart.

If obedience is to be rendered – then there must be a frame of heart that fears God and stirs the desire to obey God. Our time around this communion table is designed to do just that. As we gaze upon the bread and the cup and remember the broken body and shed blood of Christ then our hearts should be stirred by the remembrance that although God was at one time unapproachable, He is approachable now. Our hearts should be stirred by the remembrance that although condemnation was our just desert – there is no condemnation now; although we were once alienated from the promises of God we are now brought nigh by the blood of Christ.

How can we fail to pledge the obedience of faith and love to One who pledged Himself to us and out of love for us obeyed His Father's will all the way to Calvary's cross? May we learn the fear of God today, then – by knowing the truth of the greatness of God and our sinfulness by way of contrast. And may we from humble hearts as well as hearts that are purged from sin by the blood of the everlasting covenant pledge ourselves to God today through our partaking of these elements that we will, by His grace, follow Him in the obedience of faith as our hearts are moved by His obedience unto death which death procured our salvation.