

# “He Who Has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear”

Luke 14:25-35

All three appointed readings for today offer some challenging words that need attention. In Deuteronomy 30, we have a combination of predictably bad translating and fertile ground for misunderstanding. Whenever you come across the word “obey” in regard to the commands or Word of God, understand that the legalistic concept of “obey” is not the focus of the Hebrew word “shema.”

It means to “hear, listen, guard, keep, cherish” God’s Word of Law and Gospel. It is not “obeying His voice” but “listening to His voice and holding fast to Him” [Deut. 30:20] – the same way we desire our children to listen to our voice and do our will out of love and honor for their father and mother. Instilling fear and pouring out wrath upon them is to be the last resort. “He who has ears ‘to hear’ let him hear.” Jesus does not say, “Let him obey.” It is love for God created in you by the Holy Spirit, not the fear of hell, that creates faith.

Also, when He says, “by keeping His commandments and His statutes and His rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land,” this does not apply you or me.

You have the general rules of the 10 Commandments that have always applied to everyone. Cain did not have to have a stone tablet with “Thou shalt not kill” written on it for him to know it was wrong to kill his brother Abel. The Law is written on everyone’s heart.

However, God made a specific covenant with Moses and the Israelites where He handed down very specific rules that governed most all aspects of their life and the punishments for breaking those rules. And He offers great and mighty promises of blessing and prosperity to the Israelites if they keep His covenant and worship Him only.

Honor you father and your mother that it may be well with you and you may live (bad translation: long on the earth); it actually says, “that you may live long in the land.” (Haaretz: the land). And in Leviticus 20, God promises that if you break the covenant, the land “will vomit you out.” The covenant with Moses is a land contract between God and the Israelites. Much of it does not apply to you or me.

When you read the books of Moses, you have to understand this or you will end up in the land of Joel Osteen and the gospel of Prosperity – which is not the Gospel.

The Old Testament covenant that applies to you is the covenant with Abraham. God promised that the Seed of Abraham, the Messiah, the Christ would be a blessing to all nations, and Abraham believed and his faith was credited to him as righteousness. That is the promise we return again and again to hear in the Word of God. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

In our reading from Philemon, we hear Paul’s advice to Philemon, a slave owner, and what to do with his runaway slave who has come to know Christ. There are those who condemn Paul for not condemning slavery. However, slavery ended in that world, not because of a radical uprising or public demonstrations. Slavery ended in that part of the world because the Gospel was preached, the people of God put value on life, and the message of Christ dying for the sins of all people prevailed. Slavery ended in that

part of the world because Christian slave owners were, on account of the Gospel, were called to treat their slaves as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Prior to the Civil War, there were German Lutherans in the South who were slave owners. The Lutheran slave owners typically taught their slaves to read Scripture, had them learn the Catechism (in German, of course), and many (unfortunately not all) but many worshiped together with them. They treated them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Did you ever wonder why there is a Concordia University in Selma, AL, which historically was a predominantly black school? Dr. Marmaduke Carter, who retired from fulltime ministry in 1957, was a black Lutheran pastor from Alabama who came to do mission work in Chicago, and he spoke fluent German.

Now clearly, slavery is wrong. There is no counter argument. But, like St. Paul, we live under a secular authority which tolerates many things that are contrary to the will of God. The point that Paul makes is that the Gospel, not the Law, has changed your relationship with the people in your life. You have been saved by grace; your faith has been credited to you as righteousness; and the same is true for all of your brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter how low on the economic scale they might be. Remember they are brothers and sisters.

Which brings us to our Gospel reading from Luke 14: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

So, if you had a fight with your family and you hate them all, then you must be right with God. Clearly, that is not what Jesus is saying. "Hate," as Jesus uses the word, means to reject, renounce, or disown. In the Old

Testament, God says, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” Esau was rejected. He sold his birth rite for a bowl of soup. He treated God’s Word of promise as being cheap and common.

If your loyalty to your father and mother, or son or daughter, or husband or wife, or to yourself interferes with your relationship and devotion to Christ, this is what Jesus is talking about. If you hold them in higher value than God’s Word of promise, like Esau, you treat it as being cheap or common.

I join in the chorus of many parents who say, “I would do anything for my children.” And there is nothing wrong with that sentiment unless we say, “I would do anything for my children, so I don’t really have time for “church stuff” right now.” That is a very dangerous way to live.

God’s message to His children has always been the same. Along with the promise of the land to the Israelites, there was also the promise that the living God is a God of justice and if the Israelites did not hear, listen, guard, and cherish His Word of promise, they would be removed from the land.

God has promised, like Abraham, your faith is credited to you as righteousness. No matter what your place is on the economic scale – whether you are wealthy or you have nothing – the only item of lasting value is your faith in the saving Word of God. And this makes your relationship with Christ primary.

Your love for your father or mother cannot save you. Your love for your son or daughter is but a pale reflection of the love your Father in heaven has for you. God’s Word is filled with a consistent message that is difficult for our sinful nature to hear. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Amen.