

**Learn to Fear the Lord
Deuteronomy 31:9-13**

Brothers and sisters, we all love a good transition story, don't we...? We love to hear about how someone went from rags to riches, from the underdog to the champion, from a coward or a scoundrel to a noble hero, from suffering and adversity to happily ever after.

It's what makes a movie popular and successful and memorable. You want rags to riches – Pretty Woman, or Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, you want underdog to champion – gotta go with Rocky! or the Karate Kid, or Gran Turismo. A scoundrel who becomes a hero – that's Tony Stark in Iron Man.

And if you grew up in Canada, or in the West – you will realize that we've been hearing stories like this since we were children, haven't we? There's Cinderella, Snow White, Alladin, The Ugly Duckling... and for the children who are too young to understand those stories we have kids books about how

tadpoles become frogs and caterpillars turn into beautiful butterflies.

Now I wish I had some examples of fairy-tales and stories from Africa and Asisa as well – but I'm a bit limited in my knowledge of them – however, I'm willing to bet there are transition stories that you would hear, from childhood, in those cultures as well.

And these transition stories influence us brothers and sisters, they shape us so that as adults we still enjoy them and resonate with them and we love to highlight other transition stories wherever we find them.

Just look at the popularity of TV shows about home renovations and restoring old cars, or restaurant makeover, or losing weight and personal transformation. We love to see the transition from worn out and dingy and run down and broken to being redesigned and new, something or someone that has potential becoming all that they were meant to be.

And I don't know if you've ever thought about the people of Israel in this way brothers and sisters, as being part of a transition story, but that's certainly what God had planned out and intended for them.

In Ex 19:5-6, when Israel is gathered at Mt. Sainai and God declares to them *"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*

And God's goals and intentions are revealed in Isaiah 42:6-7, God says *"I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison..."* and in Isaiah 49:6 *"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."*

Of course, Israel's entire transition story occurs – as we learned last week – providentially... because of the Covenant Promise which God made to Abraham, which not only

included promised land... but also an assurance to Abraham that all nations on earth would be blessed through him, and through his descendants.

So, Israel's transition story might look like it's a rags to riches theme - as they go from being slaves to living free in the promised land - but they are actually being transitioned from profane to sacred, from ungodly to godly, from living in darkness to being a light to others.

And, in a good transition story there's always something that facilitates the transition and helps it to occur. Cinderella has her fairy godmother, Alladin has the Genie in the magic lamp, Restaurant makeover has Gordon Ramsey yelling at the owners to change... and up to this point Israel has had Moses.

Moses has led them out of Egypt, Moses brokers the covenant for them with Yahweh, Moses receives the stone tablets with the Law for them, Moses then teaches them God's Laws and helps them build the Tabernacle and anoints the Priesthood, Moses intercedes on behalf of the people and keeps Yahweh

from destroying them for their rebellion and disobedience, Moses leads the people in the wilderness... up to this point Moses has facilitated all the stages of Israel's transition story.

But as we learned last week, Moses can't lead them across the Jordan to take the Promised Land and destroy the Canaanites – God is transferring that leadership responsibility to Joshua.

However... Moses will still help to facilitate God's plan to transition Israel to become a royal priesthood and a holy nation, it just won't be in person – it will be through the Law.

Thus our scripture passage this morning, starts off stating *"Moses wrote down this Law"* (Deut 31:9) and this is a bit of an editorial insert which includes the Ten Commandments and the entirety of the first five books of the bible - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and... Deuteronomy.

This is what was known as the Law, the Torah – and all of Israel knew that it was God's Law, but Moses had been such a focal point of mediating it to them, and then writing it all

down to pass it on to them, that Moses and the Law become synonymous, so that making a reference to Moses would be making a reference to God's Law in the Torah.

So, Moses will still be facilitating Israel's transition into a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, and a light for the gentiles, since he has written down and passed on the Torah to them. So let's take a closer look at that how the Law of Moses will accomplish this.

And we see that the Law will facilitate this transition through being passed on. Moses passes it on to the Priests and to the Elders and they in turn are charged to pass it on to the people of Israel through reading it to them at regular intervals.

This will enable the people to do what Moses instructed them to do earlier in Deuteronomy 6:7 to *"Impress [God's Laws] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."*

So, the Priests and the Elders have the responsibility to pass it on through reading it to the people, and the people are responsible to pass it on to their children by talking about it.

And there are three specific times at which the leaders will read the Law to the people. First it must be done every seven years – but not just any seven-year period, it must line up with the year in which debts are cancelled and slaves are set free.

Second, they are to read it as part of the celebration of the Festival of Tabernacles, which comes during the harvest time.

Third, it is to be done whenever Israel was required to gather together at the central worship site – where the Tabernacle would be located, which was at Shiloh first, and then at the Temple when it was built in Jerusalem.

And all the people were expected to listen to these readings, not just the men – but women and children as well AND even the non-Israelites, the immigrants who lived among them, it was expected that everyone would hear and listen to the Law.

Because there is an individual transition which occurs from hearing the Law, which is described in vs.12-13, a transition from reading to hearing, hearing to learning, learning to fearing, and fearing to obedience.

And, as this transition occurs in the lives of men and women and especially for their children and foreigners who live in Israel, the entire nation will transition into a royal priesthood and become a holy nation and be a light to the gentiles.

And its important that we understand, that the critical link in this golden chain of hearing, learning, fearing and obedience... is *fearing*.

And fearing God does not occur naturally in humans, as evidenced by the Canaanites nations that God was going to destroy through Israel, it must be learned or produced in us through the hearing of the Law.

Now fearing God is the internal transition that occurs where everything we are learning from God's Law... produces a

change of heart, mind and soul - so that we obey God's Law, it's the bridge that takes us from learning... to obedience, from knowledge... to action. Israel would not transition into a royal priesthood, holy nation, or a light to the gentiles if the Law was not followed and obeyed...

But... *"for as long as they lived in the land"* they struggled with fearing God and putting the law which they had heard into action through obedience.

Now let's switch stories for a moment ask ourselves, what's our transition story? Is it rags to riches? The underdog who becomes a champion? Scoundrel to hero? How do you see your life story progressing thus far?

Well brothers and sisters, whatever we think our transition story might be – the scriptures show us that we are actually a part of Israel's transition story. The Apostle Peter says to us in 1 Peter 2:9 *"But **you** are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the*

praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Brothers and sisters, because of Jesus Christ – who is the light of the world, and who is Prophet, Priest and King, and who saves us from our sin - Peter is able to take all the terms and descriptions of Israel's transition story and apply them to us. Jesus Christ has facilitated an amazing transition where we gentiles have been written into Israel's story, and it is now our story, it has become God's plan and intention for us – individually and as a church.

So whatever transition is going on in our life right now, whatever transition is coming up for us in the future – the reality is that it's all set within this larger transition of God's plan for us to become a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a light to world around us.

And just as Moses gave Israel a written copy of God's Law when he could no longer be with them in person, Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit.

And just as the Law was given to help facilitate Israel's transition, the Holy Spirit helps to facilitate ours – in fact the prophet Ezekiel actually connects the two. In Ezekiel 36:27 God says that I will *“put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”*

So, brothers and sisters I believe there is a word from the Lord in our passage this morning about passing on the Law; reading it, hearing it, learning it so that we fear God and obey Him. And doing this will help us keep in step with the Holy Spirit, to co-operate with the transitional work He is bringing about in our lives and deepen our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Because if the Law was a benefit to Israel and brought them blessing, in spite of their sin, now that Christ has fulfilled the Law - how much more will it bless and benefit us - who have the Spirit of Christ in us.

So, in this passage from Deuteronomy, we see the Law was to be passed on by reading and hearing. Brothers and sisters that should speak to us about our own reading and hearing of

the Law – are we reading it, are we reading all of it? How often? And are we reading it to our children?

And this isn't just talking about reading the bible brothers and sisters – which is equally as important that we do and do often, but it's talking to us about correcting an imbalance in our bible reading. Many Christians limit themselves to reading only the New Testament, and maybe some of the Psalms or Proverbs - but we can't neglect reading through the first five books of the bible and the rest of the Old Testament.

We need to read through it and hear it and learn from it and allow the Holy Spirit to use all that seems ancient and confusing and foreign to us, to challenge and undermine the influence which our ungodly progressive society has on us and combat that influence on us, as it would have done for Israel.

Now I know that doesn't sound like a super-profound Holy Spirit insight, but I can't overemphasize the importance of reading the bible, ALL of the bible, and in so far as it is within your ability to do so, making sure that everyone you are

responsible for - is hearing scripture and the especially Law – even if its just the Ten Commandments to start with.

Maybe this means reading selections from the bible after you have dinner, or reading the bible stories with your children before bedtime, and then together coming up with questions you can ask the minister to help you understand – or just talking about how you can obey God based on what you read – which is easy to do after you read the Ten Commandments.

And who knows what else the Lord will bring to your attention from the Old Testament and His Law to speak specifically to whatever situation you are going through?

I know last week I felt prompted to give God's command "*Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or terrified or discouraged because the Lord your God is with you*" as a specific word for whatever individual situations you are in. And if you commit to reading the scriptures, the O.T. and especially the Law, I am confident you will hear more Words like this as the Holy Spirit speaks to your particular situation.

And you know what brothers and sisters – the O.T. and God's Law has far more variety in the kinds of specific situations it speaks to than the N.T. does... because God's Law was concerned with every aspect of his people's lives.

Maybe you noticed that Moses gives the Law to both the priests and the elders, the religious leaders AND the civic leaders. God's law is certainly concerned with religious matters like sacrifices and atonement and festivals, but also with the details of how His people live in their day-to-day lives. Israel was to be become a royal priesthood... religious, but also a holy nation... civic. Both matter to God.

So, there are laws about how to take care of orphans and widows, laws about property lines and your property rights, how to settle disputes in court, laws to ensure you build a fence around the roof of your home so that no one falls off of it. There are laws about dealing with mildew in your home, and also instructions on cutting your hair and what kind of clothes you should wear and fabrics you should use, and of course... laws who you should marry and with whom sexual

intimacy was permitted and how to handle adultery and divorce.

So, if you are reading God's Law, hearing it, and coming to realize that God wanted His people and wants us – to know how to obey Him in every area of our lives you would be correct. And if you are struggling to know how to obey God in every area of your life – whether its your family life, or your business, or school or in sports or what kind of movies you should watch or clothes you should wear - reading God's Law is a good place to start.

And maybe you didn't realize God has plans and intentions for the clothes you wear and the movies you watch or how you spend your money or how you play sports – but brothers and sisters He does. That's all part and parcel of us becoming a royal priesthood AND a holy nation and a light to the world.

Now as you read God's Law, and it starts to produce the fear of God in you... you will begin to wonder and think *"I'm not exactly obeying all of these laws – but God commanded them,*

they are here in the bible, should I be obeying these?? Do I need to stop eating bacon cheeseburgers and lobster? Should I tell my farmer friend he should stop hooking up his donkey with his horses to pull his wagon?"

Well first of all – congratulations. The fact that you are wondering this is proof that the Law has produced the fear of God in you – that concern which comes from the fact that it is God who said something and therefore we ought to do it because God said it, and it is troubling to us if we are not – that's a good thing to have going on in you, the Fear of God.

Second of all – because Jesus has fulfilled God's Law as it was given to Moses, and given us His Spirit – we have a little bit of extra work to do when we read it in order to know how to understand and apply it in the new Covenant, so here's some guidelines for you.

First, obedience to the Law was always meant to be an expression of thanksgiving to show our gratitude to God for his deliverance and for His blessings. That's why it was to be

read every seven years when debts were forgiven and during the abundance of the harvest festival which contrasted living in the desert with being settled in the land. Gratitude.

So always remember when you are reading the Law of Moses that God has set you free from your sin through Jesus, and from earning salvation through obedience – obedience is now an expression of gratitude for all the blessings from the Lord.

Second, since the Law of Moses has a 3-fold purpose it can be divided up into 3 kinds of laws. Laws which deal with worship, for the royal priesthood. Laws that deal with civics, for the holy nation, and laws that deal with morality, for being a light to the Gentiles.

So when it comes to worship and civics laws, the particular expression for worship or civic obedience in those laws has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and is no longer required for us to observe. We don't offer animal blood sacrifices because of Jesus' sacrifice. However – the moral laws such as do not murder, do not steal, do not commit adultery are not put into

specific Mosaic expressions and while they are also fulfilled in Christ – they are still to be obeyed by us as expressions of how Christ has changed us from darkness to light.

Additionally, some of the worship laws may continue on in a different expression to point to how Jesus fulfilled them. The Passover is a good example, our Lord took that celebration and transitioned it into the Lord's Supper. And we no longer circumcise male babies as a sign of the covenant, but we administer water baptism as a sign of how the Holy Spirit seals believers and their children into the new covenant with Jesus.

And, some of the worship laws and civic laws have a moral element to them that we need to obey. For example, bringing an unblemished animal to offer as a sacrifice or bringing the first fruits of the harvest to give to God. The moral aspect of these laws that is that God is worthy of our best and it is wrong to give him the leftovers – so you can take that and apply it to whatever area of your life you're trying to determine how to be obedient in as a command that God comes first.

Or, with building a fence around your roof, there's a moral element of being a homeowner which means taking responsibility to make sure your home and your property is safe and you are eliminating liabilities that could harm people – so while its pointless to put a fence around the kind of roofs we have on our houses, it is being obedient to God's Law to make sure that your electrical system is properly wired according to the building code and to keep your steps free from ice and snow in the winter.

And lastly – because I know how easily our sinful nature can play games with us, if you're reading God's Law and you start feeling overwhelmed by all the rules, you're worried there's so many laws to obey, or that you're not obedient enough in some area of the Law, or you're afraid you've overlooked something you should be doing and God's angry about it... brothers and sisters, that's your sinful nature and the devil messing with you, causing you to forget that God didn't save you because of your obedience - but because of His love and His grace and mercy.

Obedience doesn't produce salvation... but salvation moves us to obedience.

So, return to God's grace and mercy in Jesus - remind yourself that Jesus' perfect obedience covers you, and keep in step with what it is that the Holy Spirit wants to convict you about.

Learn to spot the difference between doubting and forgetting God's grace and the Spirit pointing out an area where you need grow in obedience. You'll discover at the root of that conviction will be a desire to look for where you need to obey because you want to see God reign over all areas of your life.

So, brothers and sisters – read God's Law, hear it, learn it, and keep in step with the Holy Spirit so that we can learn how our fear of God will lead us to increased obedience and this will bless us both individually and as a church as we transition to become a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a light to the world – so that all nations will be blessed and God's salvation will reach to the ends of the earth. Amen.