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The Heart Which Pleases God

Deuteronomy 5:22-33

Series: *Loving God in Every Way*

Introduction: We come back this morning to Jesus' favorite Old Testament book – the book of Deuteronomy. You can join me there, in chapter 5. The book of Deuteronomy is a collection of sermons given by Moses to the people of Israel as they prepared themselves to enter into the Promised Land and take possession of what God has promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob. Before they made this great move across the Jordan River and began the process of purging the land of its wicked inhabitants, they need to listen and hear the instruction about God and from God. The first sermon ran from chapter 1 through chapter 4 and it detailed the story of God's delivering them out of Egypt and making a covenant with them and making them His people as He was to be their exclusive God. Then in chapters 5-12 we have Moses' second address to the people – and I have described this to you before as the peak of the mountain. The first sermon is the historical and theological ascent, this sermon is the peak of truth, and the 2 sermons to follow are the descent. As we ascended the peak in chapter 5 we came into this lush mountain meadow filled with the beautiful wildflowers of truth about God. And then we came to a mountain spring and we found the fountainhead of the rest of God's Law as we studied the 10 commandments given by God. And now, in our text for this morning, we will step back from looking at the details of this fountainhead and we will take the whole picture in again before we move on. And what we will see is a recap in the text of how this Law was given by God's people and of what their initial response was to this giving of the 10 commandments. Let's start reading in verse 22 of chapter 5.

In the book of Deuteronomy we are told 7 different times about this original giving of the 10 commandments to the whole congregation at Mt. Horeb. Just think about that for a second – there is no wasted ink in the Scriptures. There is an economy of words used by the all-wise Spirit of the Living God. He is not a rambling preacher who forgot how many times he referred to the same event in one sermon. No, the Spirit knows and has a good plan for every use. So, this is obviously a very significant historical event as it relates to the message of the book of Deuteronomy. This day in Israel's past when that generation heard the voice of the Lord speak to them out of the mountain carries constant relevance for God's people. Every time it is brought up, it is used in a little bit different way. So, in chapter 4 it is brought up in verse 15 to remind them that when God appeared to them at the mountain in the fire, he did not have a shape or a form, so when they worshipped the Lord, they were not to make a shape or form to represent Him. Then, later in chapter 4 Moses rehearses this event of God speaking to them again to teach them that there is none other like God. He is the one and only true God. Then in the first part of chapter 5 he brought up the event as a prelude to the 10 commandments – to remind them that

these 10 words are God's Words spoken uniquely to God's people on the mountain – therefore, they must listen up!

And then here, in our passage for this morning, the event is recounted once again as a postlude to the 10 commandments. As if to say, these are indeed God's Word and they are not to be tampered with or forgotten. But also to show them the kind of heart response God is pleased with as it relates to these 10 commandments. Then in chapter 9, the event will come up again to make the point that their God is a consuming fire and they need not fear the enemies they will face when they cross the Jordan. And again in chapter 9 the event will be referenced once more as a prelude to their idolatrous rebellion of forming the golden calf in Moses' absence. The point of that text will be to say to the present generation that even though their parents saw the great glory of God displayed at Mt. Horeb, still they were quick to go their own way and forget His truth. And then in chapter 18 this event will be recounted one last time to teach them that there was a new prophet who would come, who, like Moses, would speak for God to them. I say all of that to say that this is not just another boring rehearsal of the same event, but rather this is such a significant moment in their history that they must never stop learning its many lessons.

In this text, Moses rehearses the Mt. Horeb experience as a fitting conclusion to the 10 commandments. In verse 22 he tells us that God spoke these 10 commandments. Then in verses 23-27 he tells us about the response of God's people after hearing the thundering voice of the Lord. And then in verses 28-31 we have the response of God to the response of God's people. He was pleased with their fear of Him, and he told them to return to their tents. And then in verses 32-33 Moses calls the current generation to be careful to obey the Lord who has spoken these 10 commandments. The emphasis in this 4th recounting of this unique revelation of God to His people at Mt. Horeb is to put on display the heart response which pleased the Lord on that day. We are given details about their response here in these verses that are missing in the 6 other explanations. And these details are here to show us the heart which pleases God.

Before we lay out what that heart looks like, let me try to paint the scene for you. This is a compilation of the accounts given to us in Exodus 19-20 and the various accounts of this event given in Deuteronomy. Imagine this scene with me. Moses has come around and told everyone that they need to be consecrating themselves for the next 3 days because on the 3rd day God has something planned, and they must be spiritually and physically ready. On the morning of that 3rd day there is a palpable and fearful anticipation among the people. As they go about their normal morning routines they suddenly hear in the distance loud thundering, lightning crashing down, and a thick cloud descending on the mountain. A very loud trumpet blast is heard, and everyone knows this is not a trumpet that any human blew. Moses leads them from their camp out to the foot of the mountain to meet with God. As they approach they see more clearly that the mountain is wrapped in smoke because the Lord has descended upon the mountain in a column of unquenchable fire which ascends into the sky as far as the eye can see. Moses continues to draw near the mountain as they people follow in hesitant fear. The mountain trembled underneath the weight of the glory of God and as the people approach the trumpet blast grew louder. Finally Moses spoke to the Lord and the Lord responded in a thunderous voice calling Moses up into the mountain. As Moses went up the people were reminded to stay back away

from the mountain so that they would not be consumed by the outburst of God's holiness. Soon, Moses reappeared descending the mountain and he began reminding the people that they must not touch the mountain and they must not break through the barrier to try to see God on the mountain or they will surely die. While Moses is at the foot of the mountain God speaks for all to hear with this thunderous voice never before heard by human ears. And what he said to them is the 10 words, the 10 commandments of verses 6-21.

God could have chosen to reveal these 10 commandments to his people any way He chose. But he does it this way for a very important reason. Every part of this interaction between God and his people communicates the exalted position of God and the glorious power of God. So, they come to a mountain, which by its very geography communicates their inferiority. God's descension to Earth is on Earth's highest point – a mountain. And then this mountain is filled with fire and cloud and thick darkness. These elements communicate the mystery of the glory of God. God is so great that when He shows up in our world He communicates the magnitude of His glory in overwhelming and mysterious ways. When fire is associated with God in Scripture it is almost always to carry out His judgment upon mankind. The angel that was sent to the entrance of the Garden in Genesis 3 wielded a sword that was flaming with fire. It was meant to keep Adam and Eve from the Tree of Life. In Genesis 19 fire falls from Heaven and consumes Sodom & Gomorrah in an act of God's holy judgment. In Leviticus 10 Aaron's sons, Nadab & Abihu, were offering strange fire before the Lord and so fire fell down from the Lord and consumed them in judgment. In Numbers 16, the 250 followers of Korah are consumed by fire from the Lord as evidence that they were judged as being sinfully rebellious before God. And 2 Peter 3 describes how the present heavens and earth are being stored up for the day of their judgment with fire from God. This fire they saw on that day was understood to show the holiness of God.

And this fire was also surrounded with this great cloud and with thick darkness. So, even in the bright display of the glorious holiness of God, there is mystery and darkness. Even in the revelation of God to His people he is showing them that they cannot know Him completely. He is revealed truly to us here, but he is never revealed exhaustively. There is always mystery to the character, nature, and essence of the very God who is making himself known here. And he is making himself known through this loud voice – this obviously non-human voice. This is the overwhelming scene recorded for us here.

But the focus of our text is on the response of God's people to this grand revelation of their God. What effect did it have on them to see the mountain trembling, to hear the thunder, to see the strikes of lightning, to witness the column of fire burning up the mountain, to see and smell the great cloud of smoke, to experience the thick and mysterious darkness, and then to hear the thunderous voice of God say to them, "I am the Lord your God"? Well, they are humbled and fearful and cry out to Moses to make it all stop. This is not because they don't love God or want to hear from Him, but because they are so overwhelmed by the great display on the mountain that they are sure they will die if God keeps speaking to them. And so, they know they need a mediator between them and God and they plead with Moses to be that mediator.

What I think should capture our attention in this text is God's statement in verses 28-29. He heard their words to Moses and He was pleased with their response. In other words, the overwhelming display of God's power and glory had its intended effect. It struck fear in the hearts and minds of God's people. He even says in verse 28 that they are right in all that they have spoken about needing a mediator so that the great fire of the Lord does not consume them. But then, in verse 29 he says that he wishes they had this heart always – to fear him and to keep all his commandments. He knows that in a matter of days, after Moses returns up the mountain the people will forget these very words of command and they will demand that Aaron form an idol for them to worship. So, the heart response of the people at the foot of the mountain is pleasing to the Lord, and one that needed to continue, but didn't. So, beloved, what is this heart response which pleased the Lord so much? And how do we keep this heart before the Lord? Well, the heart which pleases God in this text is the heart which is fearful, humble, and determined.

The Heart Which Pleases God:

I. Fearful – vs. 22-27a

- a. This fear of the Lord is the first aspect of a heart which pleases God. And this is the immediate response of the people upon seeing this great display at the mountain. They sent the heads of the tribes directly to Moses and look at what they say in verse 24.
- b. They heard, they saw, they lived – and now they cry “uncle.” They have had enough, and they fear for their lives. They are convinced that the column of fire ascending into heaven is going to break out against them if they stay there any longer. They know they need a different way for God to communicate with them. And so, in verse 26 they ask a question which tees up their request for Moses to go talk to the Lord on their behalf. They say in verse 26 – “For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire as we have, and has still lived?” Well, in that conversation both parties could actually answer affirmatively. But the nature of the question was that they were convinced it wouldn't happen again. But Moses on the other hand – he had heard the Lord talk to him out of the fire before and he had lived. The Lord had appeared to him in the burning bush on this very mountain about 40 years prior. So, by their question they know that Moses can go and talk to God on their behalf.
- c. I love that statement in verse 27 – “Go near and hear all that the Lord our God will say.” They were too aware of the great glory and vast holiness of God. They were too captured by the breaking out of the power and awesomeness of God. They knew that they had no right to get any closer. But they knew Moses could. So they tell him to go near and hear all that God has to say. They want to hear from God, and they want to be near God, but they are so aware of how great God is, they know they need someone to go near for them. It is this fear of the Lord which pleases the Lord. It is this heart which is so overcome by the vast difference between Creator and creature. It is this heart overwhelmed by the bright and yet mysterious revelation of the glory of God. It is this heart filled with

dread that the living God is going to break out against my own sinfulness and deal thoroughly and completely with me. It is this heart of full awareness that God is great and greatly to be feared. This is the heart which pleases God.

- d. And specifically in this text, this fear of the Lord produced a pressing demand for a mediator. They saw a small glimpse of the glorious holiness of God and they inherently knew that they needed someone to represent them to God and someone to represent God to them. Without a mediator they would certainly die.
- e. You see the obvious Gospel foreshadowing here don't you? Mankind cannot stand before the living God without a mediator. It will mean certain judgment and eternal death because of our great sinfulness. These elders of the people were right – we need someone to go near for us. We could never be in the presence of such pure white-hot holiness based on our own merit. We would be burned up by the righteous wrath of God.
- f. So, God came down to us when Jesus left Heaven and became a man. He didn't just come to our highest mountain in great display of glory. Rather, he came in the humility of human birth to a poor couple through the virgin birth. He came as the servant of all and he humbled himself to the point of finally ascending another hill that would be covered in thick darkness and would tremble under the weight of the glory of God. On this mountain Jesus, as God in the flesh, would be nailed to an execution stake and would suffer the agony of the condemnation of sin. His blood shed for us becomes the cleansing flood which washes over our souls and cleanses us so that we may be made right with God and may confidently approach Him. 1 Timothy 2 says:
 - i. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Tim. 2:5-6 ESV)
- g. This one mediator does not just represent us to God and God to us, but rather he has made peace between us through the blood of His cross. Therefore, we no longer have to writhe in the fear of condemnation as we prepare to approach God. Hebrews 10:19 says it this way:
 - i. ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (Heb. 10:19-23 ESV)
- h. But this doesn't mean that we can just forget this fear of God thing and be flippant before Him. Rather, because we have this blood of Christ which has earned us access we should have a deeper and more holy fear than we ever did apart from Christ. We ought no longer fear His judging wrath against us if we are in Christ, but we now should grow into a reverential awe of this God whose holy

demands are met with the holy sacrifice of His Son in our place. I should go deeper into this fear of the Lord, not be absent of it.

2. Humble – 27b

- a. But how would you know if you are walking in this fear of the Lord or not? Well, what we see in our text is that one of the most apparent traits which flows out of this fear of the Lord is humility before the Lord. So, the heart which pleases God is fearful of the Lord, and humble before the Lord. Just think of that scene once again. They see and hear all the clear displays of the greatness of God. And instead of running away out of fear, they are drawn to Him in humility. They know they need a mediator, but the fact that they want a mediator is key here. The grand exhibition of God's glory and the clarity of God's voice put them in their place and made them want to know more from God.
- b. Just imagine a professor in a college classroom trying to teach his students more about Albert Einstein's theory of quantum particles of light, when all of a sudden Einstein walks through the door of the classroom in a grand entrance. The teacher would be immediately awed by the fact that one of the greatest scientists to ever live was in their classroom, and he would be humbled before him. He would certainly turn over the class to Mr. Einstein and ask him to teach his students his quantum theory of light particles.
- c. In a similar way, the people of God were put in their place before their Maker and Redeemer. They were shown a glimpse of His glorious presence and they were humbled before Him and this drove them to want to know more from Him. So, in verse 27 after they ask Moses to go near and hear all that the Lord will say, then notice what they say next – and speak to us all that the Lord our God will speak to you. Their desire for a mediator was coupled with their desire to know God better. They were humbled as a result of their fear.
- d. So, let's apply this to us today. We're not going to have this mountain experience, but we have a greater privilege, according to Peter. We have the clear and complete Word of God given to us in our own language. And so, we have constant access to the glorious revelation of God, and we have been given everything we need for life and godliness in God's Holy Word. So, you can know if you are fearing the Lord and seeing Him as your glorious and all-powerful God if you are humbly seeking to know Him more in His Word. Does your heart lean into the Word with humble desire to know God better? And the answer there is more of a scale than it is a destination. And it is often a fluctuating scale because we are complicated and sinful people. But what is the overall posture of your heart before God as seen in your relationship to His Word? Can you say that you fear Him as evidenced by your humble desire to hear more and learn more from the God whose Word this is?

3. Determined – 27c-33

- a. Then lastly notice that the heart which pleases God is determined. This fear produces humility and out of this humility should produce a determination to live in light of what has been revealed. So, in verse 27, after expressing their desire to

have Moses go near and hear all that God would say to them and come and tell them, then they said – we will hear and do it.

- b. That is quite the statement of determined commitment to hear and heed the Word of God. And you might be thinking, but they didn't do it, so what good is it? In a matter of days they will break the first, the 2nd, and arguably the 3rd command of the 10 commandments. So, apparently, they didn't really mean it when they said they would listen and obey. But, actually, I think they did mean it. I say that because of how the Lord describes their heart in verse 29. He sees in their words a sincere determination to follow the words they hear about Him. He also knows how fickle the human heart is, and how volatile our commitment can be. But they were determined and committed to obeying what they heard.
- c. And this is the mark of a fearful and humble heart – this determined posture to obey what is revealed from the Lord. This determination to obey was diminished as the people of God left the obvious presence of God and no longer heard His voice. Though that stoked fear in their hearts, this fear produced the humility necessary to keep walking in God's ways rather than their own. Rather than remind themselves of the greatness of God seen on the mountain and the clarity of God's voice commanding their exclusive worship of Him alone, they forgot and walked away.
- d. So, where is your determination to follow God waning and lacking? What area of your life is faltering in the area of obedience? Specifically, think back through the 10 words of God. Are you worshiping God exclusively? Are you refusing to put other objects in life in His place, worshiping the gift rather than the Giver? Are you taking the Lord's name in vain? Are you failing to honor Christ by resting in Him as your Sabbath provider? Are you honoring your father and mother as you ought? Are you taking the life of another through anger, through words, or through actual physical harm? Are you dishonoring marriage by walking in adulterous thoughts, words, or actions? Are you taking things that don't belong to you because you have determined that you matter more than the original owner? Are you misrepresenting others in your speech so that you can gain the advantage over them? Are you coveting what isn't yours because you are convinced that this is the next key to your contented happiness?
- e. Where that is true, the answer is not simply to stop and to put on the right behavior. Rather, the answer is to return to the mountain of God's revelation and see the Law Giver Himself. You have not just failed to obey God, but you have left a fear of the Lord. And so, you need to see Him high and lifted up. You need to be reminded of the great weight of your own sinfulness as a breaker of this Law. And you need to see with fresh sight the great sacrifice of Christ for you to be your Mediator and to shed His blood so that you can be cleansed of this Law breaking. The great antidote to the breaking of God's Law is a greater comprehension of the glory of the God of the Law who redeemed you from your law breaking.

Conclusion: I mentioned at the beginning that this Mt. Horeb event was mentioned 7 times in the book of Deuteronomy. Well, there are also 13 times in the book of Deuteronomy where fearing God is preached about by Moses. And of those 13 times there is a direct link to the Word

of God in 11 of them. And of those 11 there is an attached call to obedience. So, catch the link here – hearing God leads to fearing God which leads to obeying God. That is God’s process. You must hear Him in faith, and you must be awed by the greatness of His glory and this must humble you before Him which should then produce in you a committed determination to obey all that he has said. May God ever grow that kind of heart in us continually as His blood-bought people. Let’s pray.