



The Fight

SERIES: *Turning Point: Start Fresh/Stay the Course*

This morning we're continuing our study in Deuteronomy. You'll remember this book contains sermons that Moses spoke to the children of Israel before they entered the Promised Land. Today we come to ch.7 where Moses deals with an issue that's very challenging for us today. It's the issue of how the Israelites were to handle and relate to the Canaanite people who were already in the Land. Many years earlier God called Abraham to leave his country and go to this new land. God said, "I'll give that land to you and your descendants and I'll make you a great nation." Abraham obeyed God and he and Sarah went and lived there for many years. They raised their son Isaac there and Isaac raised his sons Jacob and Esau there as well. But then there was a famine that spread throughout that middle east and Jacob's sons, the sons of Israel, moved to Egypt where they remained for 400 years. Eventually, they became so numerous that the Egyptian Pharaohs were threatened by them and forced them into slavery. But God delivered them in this great event called the Exodus. His plan all along was to bring them back into the land he had promised to Abraham and his descendants.

Now as Moses speaks to them they're ready to go and take possession of the land. But there was this problem. There were all these different tribes of people who for the last 400 years had come into the land and settled there. These were the Canaanites. They had a religion that involved idol worship and practices like ritual prostitution and child sacrifice. And so the big question was, "What do we do with these people? How do we handle them? They certainly won't throw a welcome home party for us as we just traipse in there and take over. Should we befriend them? Should we avoid them? Should we try to blend in with them? What should we do?"

And this, of course, is an issue that we have to deal with as well. As followers of Christ we've been sent into the world. But the world is at odds with what we believe. The world is in the grip of someone other than God. The apostle John wrote, **"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one"** (1Jn. 5:19). As a result, the world is now driven by a way of thinking about life that's antithetical to the things God values. Listen again to John, **"All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world"** (1Jn. 2:16). And this proud, greedy, lustful spirit is the essence of idolatry. Paul wrote about **"immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry"** (Col. 3:5). So even today we're facing the same thing the Israelites were facing as they went into this Land. How do WE handle that? How do we relate to the world?

I. We are to live differently from the world.

The instructions that God gave to the sons of Israel were very clear. Listen to what he says.

"When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and bum their graven images with fire" (vv.1-5).

God says, "Listen, you're going in there and I'm going to deliver them before you. But you have to do something, too. You have to stay separate from them and you have to destroy them." Now this may bother you. How could God encourage such violence? How could God encourage the destruction of women and children? But before you react to this let's be sure we understand what's really being said. The translation we have here is misleading. Several very fine scholars point out that rather than translating this as a command to "destroy" them this is "an absolute and irrevocable renouncing of things or persons, a refusal to take any gain or profit from them. So in obedience to this command, things or persons could be renounced without necessarily being destroyed." This is consistent with what Moses says later about not making treaties and intermarrying with them. Why would you worry about intermarrying with people if you destroyed them? It's also consistent with what they actually did when they got into the land. All but two of the battles Israel fought were defensive; the Canaanites attacked them. And only four cities were destroyed in the conquest. I might add that some cultures are so depraved that they need to be completely destroyed. Like a fungus, if you leave even the smallest remnant, it will eventually overtake you. But the idea here is they were to stay separate from the people around them and renounce their way of life. This extended into every arena of life. Politically, they weren't to make treaties with them.

Socially, they weren't to intermarry with them. Religiously, they were to tear down their alters and idols.

What does this mean for us? We know God has sent us into the world and we know he's called us to reach the lost. But God calls us to live differently from the world. This involves our behavior; our choices but even more so our values. What does the world value? It values things, possessions. It values appearance; having the right clothes; the right image. It values pleasure; having a good time. It values success and power; getting on top and staying there. It values performance; good grades; good scores; good schools. None of these things are wrong in and of themselves, but the world takes these good things and makes them into ultimate things. People of the world live for these things. They're defined by them.

Let me honest about this: I don't see believers living all that differently than the world around us. We come in here and get our "God-fix" once a week and leave feeling really good and then we go home and live exactly like everyone else. When Jesus said, "You're the light of the world," I think he meant we're supposed to stand out. We're called to value things the world doesn't value. We value servanthood; not grabbing power but giving it away. We're called to value purity. We believe sex is such an awesome gift of God it's to be protected and enjoyed within the lifelong commitment of marriage. And, yes, that requires discipline and sacrifice for single people as well as lifelong fidelity for married people. We're called to value character over appearance. We're called to value compassion and caring for those in need over accumulating more and more stuff. How would this place be different if we all lived that way? Do you think we'd stand out more?

Think about this as it relates to what's been happening in our economy lately. When it comes to our savings; our retirement accounts, the value of our homes, most of us have had a rough few weeks. How are you feeling about that? People are really worried, even panicked. Have you noticed? But as believers, shouldn't our response be different? How can we be salt and light in this world if we react the same way? It's hard for us; we don't like it. But if our treasure isn't here but there then there is no reason to panic, is there? What a great time to show people around us where true security and true riches are. We don't trust in the economy, or the government, or our bank accounts; we trust in God.

Or think about this as it relates to our TV habits. The average American family watches 7 hours of TV a day. 26% of kids age 2 and under have a TV in their room. The average American child sees 40,000 commercials a year. Advertisers spend \$15 billion a year telling them what's hot. Nearly 2 out of 3 TV programs contained violence; averaging 6 violent acts per hour. There are more than twice as many violent incidents in children's programming than in other types of programming. Sexual content appears in 64% of TV all programs and averages 4.4 scenes per hour. And what do we do? We send them to Sunday School once a week for an hour and hope for the best. How are your kids going to not just learn but internalize kingdom values that way? Do we really want our kids learning sex education from *Grey's Anatomy*? It's in arenas like this that our values have to

translate into hard choices. You turn the TV off. You monitor closely what your kids watch and what you watch. I'm not one of those guys that says throw out the TV, but if you can't control it, that's the best option. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out."

Make no mistake, we're in a fight and to win this fight we'll have to be ruthless because everything around us will oppose us. If you live this way you'll be walking upstream against a very strong current. That's why the Christian life is well described as a fight and if you're really in this fight you'll feel the pressure.

II. We are chosen as God's holy people.

But Moses doesn't leave it there. He goes on and tells us WHY fight this fight. Sometimes a parent will tell a child to do something and the child will ask "why" and the parent will say, "Because I said so." God could just say, "Because I said so" but he doesn't do that. Instead he gives us a compelling reason to fight. Look at v.6. **"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."** Do you see it? The reason is that you're a holy people to the Lord your God. Notice Moses says they aren't to live this way in order to be holy, but they're to live this way BECAUSE they're already holy. And they're holy by virtue of the fact that God has chosen them to be a people for his own possession. The idea here is that they're God's treasure; his inheritance. He's set them apart. He's set his affection on them. He's said, "You're mine!" And because of that they're to live a certain way; they're to live like people who belong to him.

Maybe an illustration will help. When our kids were younger we decided as a family we wanted a second dog. We already had an older Golden Retriever and we thought it would be good for her to have a younger friend. We decided on a smaller dog because two big dogs would be too much. After some research we decided on a breed. We wanted a Cairn Terrier. Remember *Todo*—that "yappy" little dog in *The Wizard of Oz*? That's a Cairn Terrier. So we started looking around and the closest breeder was in Sacramento. We called her and made an appointment and piled the kids in the minivan and drove all the way to the east side of Sacramento. It turns out she only had two puppies left and somehow we just knew right off the bat which one we would choose. I had read about all the fancy ways to pick a puppy but when we saw Mitch we just knew he was the one. We paid for him and put him in the doggy carrier and drove him home. We did all the things you're supposed to do with a new dog. We paid for his shots. We house trained him. We fed him the right food. We took him out for walks. And, of course, because of all that we expected Mitch to act like our dog. Right? When we called his name we wanted him to run to us, not someone else. I mean, we chose him! We paid for him. We fed him. And we trained him. That's what God is saying here to the Israelites: "Listen, I chose you to be my people. I paid for you. I redeemed you. I fed you in the wilderness. I trained you. Now don't go running off to some other god."

Did you know the New Testament says the same thing about us who trust in Jesus? Jesus himself said, **"You did not choose Me, but I chose you..."** (Jn.15:16). The apostle Paul said, **"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world..."** (Eph.1:4). Stretch your mind around that. Before you even existed, God not only knew you but chose you. Peter could even use the same language Moses uses here and say, **"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession..."** (1Pt. 2:9). And because of that; because we're chosen; because we're holy, we run to his voice rather than someone else's. We live according to his values rather than the world's. I love how Paul puts it to the Colossians, **"And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience..."** (Col. 3:12-13). You see, that's living in a way that's radically different than the world around us. Why? Because we're "chosen of God, holy and beloved."

III. Two problems in living as God's holy people.

But this raises some questions. There are some problems with this. As a matter of fact, as the chapter unfolds Moses deals with two practical problems that the Israelites would have to deal with and we have to deal with as well.

A. The problem of pride: The first is the problem of pride. When you hear that you've been chosen by God, why not think, "Well, God must have very good taste. God must have seen something attractive, wonderful and special about me. I mean, why else would he choose me and not someone else?" Moses addresses this in vv.7-8. **"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."**

Moses hits this head on. In essence he asks the question, "Why did the Lord love you? Why did the Lord choose you? Was it because he looked around and sized you up and compared you with everyone else and said, 'These Israelites are the pick of the litter.'" No! What's the answer he gives here? Why did the Lord love you? He loved you because he loved you. And he keeps loving you because he's faithful to keep his promises. That's the only reason we ever get for why the Lord chose us and loved us. Why does he love me? Is it something wonderful about me? No! He loves me because he loves me. The reason isn't found in me; it's found in him.

When we understand that, it creates humility. We no longer look at other people and say, "Boy, we sure are better than them." A lot of Christians act like that. We look at the world and we judge them and we're self-righteous and we point the finger and we act like we know it all. If there is any reason the Bible gives for why God chose us, it's not because we're better, but because we're worse. Listen to what Paul said to the Corinthian believers who had their own issues with pride, **"For consider your calling,**

brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God" (1 Cor.1:26-29). In other words, he chose you because you'd be a perfect specimen to show off his grace towards helpless sinners. If I really go back to why we chose Mitch, I think it was because he was the runt of the litter; not the biggest but the smallest. It's true of us. When you get that, it creates humility.

Knowing this also creates security. Look at it this way: If a wife asks her husband why he loves her and he says, "Well, I love you because you're so beautiful," she will always wonder if he will still love her when she gets old and isn't so beautiful. Or if he says, "I love you because you're so smart," she will always wonder if he'll still love her if he found someone smarter. Or if he says, "I love you because we have so many shared interests and we love to be active together," she will always wonder if he will still love her if she gets sick and can't do those things. But if he says, "I don't know. I just love you because I love you," she will always know that she is secure in his love. Now, husbands, it's also nice to tell her that she's beautiful and smart and you love doing stuff with her, but that's not the reason you love her. If there was something in me that drew God to me in the first place, then I'd always be afraid that if I lose that quality he might stop loving me. But, God says, "I love you because I love you and nothing you do can change that."

B. The problem of fear: So the first problem is pride. The attitude that we're better than they are. The second problem is the opposite. It's the problem of fear. The attitude behind this problem isn't "we're better than them" but "they're bigger than us." Look down at v.17. **"If you should say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?' you shall not be afraid of them;"** (vv.17-18a). Do you see the problem? The problem is we don't stand a chance against them. Do you ever feel that? Sometimes the battle that God calls us to fight against the world out there and the flesh in here and the devil down there seems overwhelming. There is so much out there that can derail us from walking with God. There is so much evil to take on. We wonder how we can even begin to make a dent in it. Most of us are just trying to survive.

God says you need to deal with that problem by calling to mind a few things. When I say "calling to mind" I mean you have to make a concerted effort. You have to preach these truths to yourself. We all talk to ourselves all day long. But a lot of what we tell ourselves is wrong. God says call to mind these things: First of all, call to mind what God has done in the past. Look at vv.18b-19. **"You shall well remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: the great trials which your eyes saw and the signs and the wonders and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out. So shall the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid."** Has God fought some battles for you?

Have you seen God carry you through some hard times? Has he ever let you down? Remember that.

Second, call to mind that he's with you NOW. Look at v.21. **"You shall not dread them, for the LORD your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God."** It's wonderful to remember what he did in the past but I need him now. God says, "I'm with you NOW." Jesus sent us into the world and said, "I'm with you always, even until the end of the age."

Finally, call to mind that the One who fought for you in the past and is with you now will fight for you and deliver you in the future. Look at vv.22-23. **"The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them quickly, for the wild beasts would grow too numerous for you. But the LORD your God will deliver them before you, and will throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed."** God says he'll fight for them and he'll deliver them and he'll destroy their enemies. But notice what he says: not all at once; little by little. God knew this was best. The Canaanites had years of experience in keeping the wild animals in control. If they were destroyed at once the Israelites would be overrun. So God says he'll deliver them gradually. It's the same with us. We want victory now. We don't want to wait. Waiting means we still have to fight and we're tired. But God says, "Be patient. Keep fighting but remember that the battle is mine."

CONCLUSION

So God says, "I am sending you into the world and you must renounce all that the world stands for. You're in the world but you're not of the world. Why? Because I've chosen you as my holy people; my treasured possession. And don't get prideful about that because it had nothing to do with you. I loved you because I love you. And don't be afraid. Though the battle seems to go on and on, I am with you. I fought for you in the past and I'll fight for you in the future. And one day you'll be totally free.

This morning we are going to take communion. Communion is a good time for us to examine our lives. It's a good time for us to ask ourselves, "Where have I compromised with the world in my thinking and in my walk?" It's a good time to confess that to the Lord and make some decisions about what needs to change.