



Not Because of Your Righteousness

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

Last Sunday was an historic day for Central Peninsula Church. We had our first preview service at Mills High School. There was a ton of work and preparation that went into making the service happen. Sunday was really an amazing day. There is one story that made everything worth it. A lady, who was invited to church by a friend, came up to me after the service and said, "Rob, I haven't been to church in over a year and this was really great and I hope to bring my daughter back here." I thank God for stories like that and I hope to hear a bunch more.

Let me give you just a few more highlights and show some pictures. To God be the glory!

We had 184 people in attendance; the service was fantastic, with only a few small kinks; there was a definite sense of momentum and a sense that, wow, God is in this place; there were a ton of people helping all over the place; set-up didn't take long; David, the janitor, is a GREAT guy who loves golf and loves Jesus; we had several new guests; we had a great lunch and time of fellowship afterwards; and I still can't believe Tony Conte cut himself and had to get 5 stitches! Here is one of the greatest things: CPC Foster City's services were all full!

Many thank you's go out to all of you for your prayers, support, and encouragement. It is really fun to have one church meeting at two locations. God is on the move.

If you have your Bibles, turn to Deuteronomy 9 as we continue our series through this book of the Bible. Before we read the first few verses together I want to share something that I believe we all struggle with. There is a lie that is out there, a lie that many people believe: good behavior equals God's favor.

There is a belief that says if I am a good person and do good things, then I will somehow earn God's favor. In other words, my performance, the things that I do, bring God's acceptance. When I do good things, God is happy with me. When I do bad things, sinful things, God is upset with me.

Another way to put this lie is this way: In order to be accepted by God I must live right.

This reminds me of a guy I just talked to not so long ago. We were hanging out and this guy who is not a Christian asks me out of the blue, "What do you think about God?" I was pretty stunned and for the next hour we had an amazing conversation about faith, religion, God, Jesus and church. At one point in the conversation we began to talk about heaven, hell and some other things and this is what he told me, "Hey Rob, I am a good guy, I don't steal, lie, cheat, I live a good life, I am fair and honest. Why

wouldn't a good God not accept me?" Ever heard anyone say that? Have you ever said that?

This lie that good behavior equals God's favor is also very prevalent in the Christian community as well. Let's face it, there is a common notion out there that churches are filled with people who think they are better than other folks, that we all have it together, that we are all really good people. We all know that is not really true—just look around! Church should be a place where no perfect people are allowed!

But for us, for those who consider ourselves Christ followers, we too have similar thoughts and struggles at some level with this lie. We say things to ourselves like, "I know God loves me and has forgiven me, BUT, if I miss my quiet time, skip church one week, if I really sin, then maybe I will be punished by God, maybe he will no longer bless me."

Now I am not saying that there won't be consequences to our actions and to sin—there is. But I do think that deep down in some of us, maybe most of us, we believe that there is a heavenly balance scale that God keeps and there are days when it leans in my favor and days when it does not.

When I am reading the Bible, praying more, working out, loving my family, etc., I have a tendency to think that God is more pleased with me than on the days when I feel like a total loser.

Have you ever felt that way?

The people we are looking at this morning also struggled with the same lie. And Moses reminds them of this important truth: it is not because of your righteousness.

I. Not because of your righteousness.

"Hear, O Israel: you are to cross over the Jordan today, to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves, cities great and fortified up to heaven, people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you have heard it said, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?' Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the LORD your God. He will destroy them and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the LORD has promised you" (Deut. 9:1-3).

Moses tells his people the great news that God is bringing them into the Promised Land. In fact, it is happening today! The Israelites can see this amazing new land across the Jordan River, they can almost taste the

fruits, nuts, pomegranates, and honey. They know that this is a good land, a prosperous land. They are eagerly anticipating settling down, building new homes, having more kids, and starting over again as a new covenant community.

Moses reminds them that God knows all their difficulties. God even knows what they are about to face. He has been with them the entire way. Moses, the great visionary, casts the vision to his people that God is good and that he is going ahead of them.

Here is a great quote that I want you to write down: "Where God leads he precedes, where God guides he provides."

That is exactly what Moses is reminding his people here. God is leading us and providing for us. Be encouraged by that because we are going to face some serious obstacles, the Anakims!

Israel had apparently learned the lessons of disobedience. They seem ready to go, but Moses and God are not done with them yet. There is still one very potent reminder that he wants to give them, a reality check, a slice of humble pie, if you will.

"Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people" (vv.4-6).

One thing that is helpful to understand here about the Hebrew language is that when something is repeated, like a word or a phrase, there is added emphasis. For example, in Isaiah 6:3 we read of the seraphim in Isaiah's vision of heaven singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy." One word holy means holy. Two holies, holy, holy, is how a Hebrew would say that God is most holy. But three times, holy, holy, holy, is off the chart holiness.

Here in our text, Moses makes it clear and warns them not once, not twice, but three times that it is not because of their righteousness that God is giving them the land. In fact, he tells them it had nothing to do with them! God did not deliver Israel because they are wonderful people. He knew all the time that they were a stubborn and rebellious group. God was going to destroy the Canaanites not because of Israel, as if they were innocent, but because they were a wicked people. Furthermore, God was fulfilling the ancient promise he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The point is made loud and clear to Israel: this has nothing to do with your good works and righteous deeds!

Nothing! In fact the gift of the land is only being given to them because of the graciousness of God. Israel will possess the land but it will not be by its power or righteousness.

A good illustration of this are the first words in Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life* – "It's not about you."

What does this mean for you and me? In what ways have you thought in your heart that it is because of your power of righteousness that something came out good and that God blessed you? Let me get out the scalpel here.

What about with childrearing? Have you ever been tempted to think that because you were such a great parent that your kids came out as well as they did? You say, "Hey, I brought my kids to church, taught them how to make good choices, they were baptized, they were well loved, we read all the James Dobson books and listened to Dr. Phil, we got this parenting thing down and look at my kids they have come out really well, thank you very much!"

The trouble with that idea is there are also a bunch of parents who did the same thing and their kids have rebelled or made unhealthy choices that brought consequences. The fact of parenting is that while we are called to shepherd our children's hearts and bring them up in the faith, that is no guarantee that they will come out the way we wanted. Parenting is all about God's grace. If your children love Jesus and are walking with him, yes, that is a testament to your parenting, but it is more a testament to God's grace, favor and blessing in your life and theirs. Remember, it is not because of your power or righteousness.

Another great example that is really hitting home for all of us is with our finances. We were taught to save, put money away, diversify our portfolio, invest in the stock market, invest in real estate. Many of us a few years ago could say with pride, "Look, I've done pretty well for myself. I've followed all the rules, I've been a good steward of my resources, I've done well at preparing for retirement."

And if you are like me, you got your investment statement in the mail in the last few weeks and you probably didn't even want to open it up! You knew it was not going to be good. Many of you are now adding a few years to your retirement plan. Again, it is a temptation to think that if I do all the right things, I'll earn this or that, when the truth is that God gives and he takes away, but blessed be the name of the Lord. It is not because of our power or righteousness that God blesses us financially or not.

Am I saying that we shouldn't work hard and instead just spend like crazy because God may or may not choose to bless us? No!

As if this reminder was not enough for Israel, Moses goes on to cite several examples from Israel's past of their stubbornness and disobedience.

II. Israel's past failures.

"Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD. Even at Horeb you provoked the LORD

to wrath, and the LORD was so angry with you that he was ready to destroy you. When I went up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. And the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words that the LORD had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And at the end of forty days and forty nights the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. Then the LORD said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you have brought from Egypt have acted corruptly. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them; they have made themselves a metal image.' Furthermore, the LORD said to me, 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stubborn people. Let me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven. And I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.' So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain was burning with fire. And the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the LORD your God. You had made yourselves a golden calf. You had turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded you. So I took hold of the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the LORD bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me that time also. And the LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him. And I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. Then I took the sinful thing, the calf that you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very small, until it was as fine as dust. And I threw the dust of it into the brook that ran down from the mount" (vv.7–21).

The first example that Moses talks about is the giving of the 10 Commandments at Mt. Horeb. We are actually going to be studying the 10 Commandments in January, so I don't want to give too much away.

a. Mt. Horeb: Over 3500 years ago, God gave Moses and the nation of Israel the 10 Commandments. The commandments were God's law of love, written in his own handwriting on two stone tablets. For 40 days and 40 nights Moses is meeting with God up on the mountain. The mountain is engulfed with fire and the presence of God. You've all seen the movies, right? Moses comes down from the mountain and what does he find? Does he find everyone thanking God and

praising him for his works? NO! He comes down to a rave, a drunken debauchery festival that would have made even Las Vegas impressed.

Moses comes down from the mountain, it was still burning with fire, and he had in his hands two stone tablets of the covenant, the agreement made between the Moses and God. He was coming down from a spiritual high, the glory of the Lord was radiating off of his face, and as he comes down he is hit with the reality of sin.

At the very moment God is giving them the commandments, his people were turning from him. Israel had made a calf of gold. Now what is that all about? Seems silly, right? But, in Egypt, the calf was a symbol of power and strength. They got restless and anxious and in an attempt to honor God, they actually thought that this would be a good idea. I think what they were actually doing was worshipping a physical representation of the Lord. They took the most powerful image from Egypt, where they had been enslaved for centuries, and began to worship it believing that it somehow represented Yahweh. What they were doing though was breaking the first and the second commandment. Moses then gets righteously angry and throws the tablets down. They break into pieces, symbolically representing the breaking of the covenant. Moses then goes WWF on the calf and breaks the thing, smashing it up into dust. Exodus tells us that he even makes them all drink it!

Why would Moses go to such extremes? Why would Moses open a sore wound again and remind his nation of this tragedy? I think the answer is simple. Moses understood two things about God here. They seem paradoxical, but they are not contradictory. First, Moses knew that God hates sin. So, he correctly and quickly deals with this very serious problem. I often wonder if we, myself included, hate sin the way Moses did. As a pastor I've seen many people play with different areas of sin in their lives and not deal radically with them and in the end many people got hurt and the consequences were gnarly.

Secondly, Moses also knew the mercy of God and therefore cries out to God that Israel might have another chance. Moses prays for his people and for Aaron. Moses submits himself and Israel to God's mercy. Moses knows how wonderful God really is. He loves you and cares for you and wants the best for you. And we know that God not only hears the prayers of Moses, but he gives them a second chance.

"At that time the LORD said to me, 'Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to me on the mountain and make an ark of wood. And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets that you broke, and you shall put them in the ark.' So I made an ark of acacia wood, and cut two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain with the two tablets in my hand. And he wrote on the tablets, in the same writing as before, the Ten Commandment that the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And the LORD gave them to me. Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark that I had

made. And there they are, as the LORD commanded me" (10:1-5).

Moses goes back up the mountain, fasts and prays again. Verse 19 says that Moses was afraid of what God might do. The original Hebrew word is more intense, it literally means that Moses greatly feared and dreaded for the people. We tend to think that meeting with God on a mountain would be a cool spiritual experience, but trust me, it's not! The holiness, power, and majesty of God only elicits one response throughout Scripture, that is people prostrating themselves before God and saying, "I am not worthy!" But God in his grace and mercy rewrites the 10 Commandments and renews his covenant with Israel. However, this time he came down the mountain and it was not Miller Time!

Well, as if this harsh reminder of Israel's past was not enough, Moses gives a few more examples of how messed up the people of Israel really were.

"At Taberah also, and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath. And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, 'Go up and take possession of the land that I have given you,' then you rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God and did not believe him or obey his voice. You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you" (9:22-24).

b. Taberah, Massah, Kibroth, and Kadesh Barnea:

Let me summarize this laundry list of failure: at Taberah you all were a bunch of complainers; at Massah you found fault with everything; at Kibroth you really messed up again; at Kadesh-barnea, you totally disobeyed God. "Shall I go on people?" "No, no, no they said, that is plenty, thank you Moses." The conclusion is that there was never a day when these people were found faithful to God. Are we any different?

I think it is safe to say that we all have done things in our past that we are not proud of. Failures, harmful words, mistakes, sin, remorse, regret and disappointments are all words we could use to describe some of our pasts. I don't know about you, but I don't like thinking about some of my past. However, at the same time, there is something really humbling about our past, isn't there? When we think of our past mistakes in light of who God is and what he has done in our lives, the past really becomes a symbol of God's mercy and grace. We are humbled that God saved us, we are thankful that in Christ God does not hold those things against us, we rejoice that in Christ we are new creatures. Whenever we are tempted to think that my good life is a result of my righteousness all we have to do is look to our past and remember how rebellious and disobedient we all really were and still are. None of us deserve his wonderful grace. Here is Moses massaging into his nation the truth of God's mighty work in spite of how sinful Israel has been.

CONCLUSION

Let me go back to what I started with this morning. Last Sunday was great. But, if I am not careful, it is real easy for me to think that God blessed me because of my hard work, because of my charisma and talent. I can easily slide into pride and ego and think that I did everything right and God should have blessed me. But that is not it at all. Last Sunday and every Sunday is about God's work and what he wants to do. It is not about me and frankly, it is not about you either.

We are all tempted every day to believe the lie that says: Good behavior equals God's favor. That is not the Gospel. That is not the message of Good News that Jesus preached.

Here's my point, and this is something we are going to look at every Sunday when we preach through the 10 Commandments: God's laws are not given to earn a relationship, they are given that we might enjoy a relationship. Christianity and following Christ is not about do's and don'ts, stand up, sit down, don't eat that, don't say that, be good, talk nice, smile, go to church, etc. It is about enjoying a relationship with Jesus. God gives us boundaries so that we can truly live.

God did not save you or me because we are good. The only kind of people God is saving is bad people. God saves us because we are sinners. He saves us for Christ's sake, not for our sake.

We see this in our passage of Deuteronomy. We like the Israelites are saved by God's grace. We didn't earn it and we will never be good enough. Thankfully God sent his son Jesus, fully God and fully man, to be perfectly righteous for us. For Christians who have placed their faith in him, we are clothed with his righteousness. The result of his work in us is a life that is lived for the glory of God.

The Apostle Paul was right when he said in Romans 1 that righteousness comes from faith. It's not because of your righteousness.