

## Serve God With All Your Heart

☆ for who He is (vv.12-14)

☆ for what He has done (vv.15-22)

In the Name of Jesus, who brings to us God's loving heart, dearly redeemed believers:

Hopefully this is not too painful, but were you ever kicked off a sports team or fired from a job? How hard that would be if your company went on to make millions, but you lost out on profit shares. Or some indiscretion, an angry moment cost you the thrill of a state championship with your former team. Better to recall times like when my boss could have fired me for felling a tree across his fence toward his house. Maybe you remember that story of my Granddad's grace. After reviewing my mistake his last words were, "Don't let it make you afraid to cut the next one." His kind encouragement led to many successful tree fallings and more challenges conquered. Kindness yields courage to rise again.

In this text from Deuteronomy, that collection of Moses' last sermons before he died, before Joshua led the Israelites across the dried up Jordan River to conquer the Promised Land – we're here after the painful review. Hear the LORD's gracious promises. God constantly does this. He cuts us down to size, then builds us up again, far higher and stronger than we could ever have been before. He gets down deep into our hearts to raise us up to heaven. **Serve God With All Your Heart...**

☆ for who He is (vv.12-14)

Good memories often flow from a painful past. If "breaking up is hard to do," as the old song goes, "making up" is sweet indeed. If you thought you were off the team, then the coach takes you back and starts sharing new plays and skills with you, you're going to run harder, jump higher and hang in there longer than ever before. That's what God's grace accomplishes in our souls too.

You can understand Israel's painful performance review in the previous chapters with just a few numbers. Try *40x40 x 2*. Forty days and forty nights – that's how long Moses was up on Mount Sinai the first time. Meanwhile, back at camp, Aaron gave in and made the golden calf. God was so angry: ***"Let me alone, so that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven. And I will make you into a nation stronger and more numerous than they."*** Instead Moses spent a second *40x40* lying on his face, eating and drinking nothing because he was busy pleading with the LORD to forgive. There were other incidents at Taberah, Massah, Kibroth Hattaavah – complaining, putting God to the test. Disaster struck at Kadesh Barnea. Major rebellion led to forty years of wandering in the wilderness and a whole generation of men dying in the desert. They lost the Promised Land. How did Moses get through to the LORD? He reminded God about His Name-reputation, how the Egyptians would say, ***"Because the LORD was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the desert." But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm.*** (9:14; 28f NIV84)

Do you realize what awesome insights into His character the LORD God is giving us here? He wants you to **Serve God With All Your Heart – for who he is**. God is fearful and awesome in His judgments to this day with storms and natural disasters. Jesus says these should remind us what we deserve because of our sins. We disobey or dishonor our parents. Husbands don't love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Wives don't respect their husbands with a devoted heart as serving God, not men. We fail to ***"observe,"*** much less *guard and treasure* God's commandments which He inscribed in stone at Mount Sinai and wrote on our hearts at creation. We owe God joyful, absolute obedience for no

other reason than He is our Creator – holy, awesome, kind and good – totally deserving of our very best day in and day out. But who of us does not need parents and pastors, teachers and bosses to remind or even discipline us for not doing our best? Our best belongs to God.

*Guarding and listening* to the LORD's statutes is like holding a huge boulder on a mountainside. On Minnesota's North Shore of Lake Superior before the tunnel was built, retainer walls kept roads clear. But if a wall gives way, a boulder can come crashing through everything in its path. God gave strict commands to Israel. As long as they would *guard* God's commandments with the wall of separation in His holy Law, all was well. But when everyone did what he wanted, it was as if the engraved tablets of stone rolled down on their heads. What was intended to guard them from evil inside and out so that God could bless them, instead became a curse. "Hang on! Don't let go!" the LORD warns. But we get lazy, lose our grip and suffer. God could just let us die in sin, death and hell. Instead He comes to win our hearts and empower us with His Gospel of all-forgiving grace. That's **who He is** – *"the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."* (Exodus 34:6f NIV84) How can you **Serve God with All Your Heart** unless you also can love Him...?

### † for what He has done (vv.15-22)

He *"set his affection on...you."* It's one of the great blessings of Baptism. I couldn't even walk to the water. I had to be carried so God could put His saving Name on me and adopt me back into His family, back on the team, back into His good graces. To make all this possible God sent His own Son to be *"taken away...by oppression and judgment....Who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken."* (Isaiah 53:8)

Isn't that how Jesus leading the rich young ruler in today's Gospel? He worked hard all his life to obey God's commandments, yet felt something missing. Jesus could see the idol in his heart: money. So Jesus told him, *"You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."* (Luke 18:18-27) But his idol stole his heart from God.

Rather than cut us off, God lovingly commands, *"Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer."* As *God of gods and Lord of lords*, no one's face or social status or bank account can turn God from doing what's right. He doesn't just say nice things and walk away. *"He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing."*

How does God get all that done today? Here's a clue from God's Great Exchange. When He put all our sins on Jesus in exchange for all Jesus' holiness on us, God had a plan to use your hands and feet, your talents and voice and everything good He created in you for helping others. Speaking of Jesus and that Great Exchange, the Holy Spirit said through Paul: *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV84)

God has done great things for us so that He could also do great things through us. Helping orphans and widows, strangers and foreigners purely out of gratitude is really God working in and through you. We are all strangers and aliens on earth, just passing through on our way to heaven following our dear Lord and Savior Jesus. *"Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. He is your praise,"* because God calls you forgiven for Jesus' sake. *"He is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes"* – which we see in the death and resurrection of God's own Son. Every day is a new adventure with God. *And nightly pitch my moving tent a day's march nearer home.* We won't pass this way again. We will live forever with God, finally free from this sinful nature, finally able to do only good as we desire. Look forward to that eternal land of light. **Serve God With All Your Heart** so many more can stand in glory with us. We will see Him as **He is** and praise Him **for what He has done.** To God be the glory! Amen.