

## SERMON

**Why Tear Pages Out of the Bible? (Deuteronomy 27)**

Ever been to a strange ceremony, somewhere where you thought you knew what you were going to but it still confused you and you wondered what was going on. Sue and I once went to a wedding in a Quaker church. A couple of friends of ours were marrying and they were going to this Quaker church. Now Quakers are into silence, or at least this church was and so we arrived, sat down and noticed, no pulpit, so I thought, short service, no sermon! The chairs were arranged in a square with one side of the square just being a single line of chairs. But we were at a wedding and I know what goes on at weddings, bride, groom, declaration, promised, rings, prayers, hymns, 'You may now kiss the bride'.

In this wedding, the bride and groom walked in very quietly and took up their seats, it was in the middle of the single chairs, but then the leader of the service said that we would go into a period of silence but if anyone felt that they had a word for the couple then they were to speak it forth. And so silence descended. Several people did say things. One person began to read from 1 Corinthians 13

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-4 NIV)

He got to about this point and he must have thought that he was hogging the limelight too much or something because I noticed that he began to speed up. Now 1 Corinthians 13 only takes about two and half minutes to read at normal speaking speed and has great words in it, but this day it ended with a gallop

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:11-13 NIV)

And so the ceremony went on.

I wonder if on that day when Joshua and the people gathered at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, that they knew what they were coming to. In some respects it would have been difficult because 'they had never done this before'. They had no tradition of it, but it had been laid down. It had been commanded as we read in verse 30, 31, 33 and 35. It had been commanded by Moses. So although it was a new ceremony it was not out of place, it was laid down.

Let us turn to Deuteronomy 27, page 204 and we are going to read the first 10 verses.

“Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people: "Keep all these commands that I give you today. When you have crossed the Jordan into the land the LORD your God is giving you, set up some large stones and coat them with plaster. Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. And when you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I command you today, and coat them with plaster. Build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. Do not use any iron tool upon them. Build the altar of the LORD your God with stones from the field and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. Sacrifice fellowship offerings there, eating them and rejoicing in the presence of the LORD your God. And you shall write very clearly all the words of this law on these stones you have set up."

Then Moses and the priests, who are Levites, said to all Israel, "Be silent, O Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God. Obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today."” (Deuteronomy 27:1-10 NIV)

Moses never entered the Promised Land, he never crossed the River Jordan, so he could never have been at the twin Mounts of Ebal and Gerizim.

But why set up such a ceremony and remember Moses did NOT set the ceremony up, it was God? If God sets something up it must be because he thinks it is important and if he thinks it’s important then so should we. So let us look at this ceremony a little closer.

### **God’s Word is Permanent**

The first thing to notice is the building material. God tells them to have a pile of large, uncut stones, which they are to cover with plaster to write the words on. So what?

Well I don’t know if it happens or happened around here but when I was younger and growing up in Braintree you would see around on some of the trees things like this, a heart with an arrow with writing in it such as RO 4 SB, so that they could have their love grow for ever as the tree grew. Of course over time the bark does grow back and the love dies and it is all very sad. No, it is a sweet thing to do.

But in graveyards, for headstones, we use materials that will last for a long time and so the pile of uncut stones is talking about the fact that God’s Word is Permanent.

Moses knew that one day he was going to die, one day he was not going to be there. Any minister worth their salt knows that one day they will move on, retire or die, hopefully in that order – it is good to retire, then die, I’m told! So provision has to be made for when the minister, when Moses was not going to be there and so these stones upon which the word of God was written were to be a permanent reminder that God’s word is permanent.

Today we do not have stones, but we do have the Bible, the word in printed form, but it is still God's word and it is still permanent. It is the Bible that is always, always more important than the preacher, than the minister. So it is the Bible we should be reading by ourselves and for ourselves.

The Bible is divided into two halves, the Old and the New Testament. Thirty-nine books in the Old and, nine times three equals..., twenty-seven books in the New Testament. This gives sixty-six books in all. This means that if I was to preach through one book a week, it would take over a year to do that includes ignored special events like Church Anniversary and other things like Christmas and Easter. And if you only read the Bible when you were at church, but you were away a week you would miss what that book said.

The other problem is that some books like Obadiah are very short, just some 21 verses long, but some are very long, so we could say we could have a sermon on a chapter a week. This would then take a mere twenty-four years to accomplish as there are one thousand, one hundred and eighty-nine chapters in the Bible. The details people who can do maths have all gone, but  $52 \text{ into } 1189 \text{ actually equals } 22.865384615384615384615384615385$  which is less than 24. True but you do have to take out the special Sundays! Some are just going 'My head hurts'.

So this means that we have to read the word of God ourselves. This is Old and New Testaments. We cannot say because we live post Christ coming that we ignore the Old Testament. Christ came to fulfil the Old Testament, which is why we no longer have a system of sacrifices, but it still has ways of how we should live, who we should behave.

We need to be those who do NOT rely on hear God's word solely from sermons, but those who also read the Bible by ourselves, for ourselves.

### **God's Word Must Be Understandable**

Back to Deuteronomy. They piled the stones up and then covered them with white plaster. When I first read this I thought it was a various on the old army motto of

If it moves salute it, if it stands still, paint it white

But no, it is not. The stones are covered in white plaster so that the writing will stand out. It had to be seen. God's Word Must Be Understandable. This means reading it in a modern version. Beware the person who says the only true version of the Bible is the King James Version or they would call it the authorised version. That is rubbish. If you want to be pedantic, you could say the only true versions are the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek.

There is nothing wrong with reading the Bible in modern English. In the seventeenth century when the King James came out, it was in modern English. Something like the NIV, or the Good News Bible or NLT, New Living Translation are all fine to name just three.

Also beware of the person who tries to bamboozle you with Bible verses, making things more and more incomprehensible, so we become more and more dependent on them to tell us what is in the Bible and what it really means. We may as well go back to what was happening in this country in the sixteenth century when the language of the land was English, but the language of the church and therefore the Bible was Latin and as the clergy were the only ones versed in Latin, the congregation were dependent on the clergy to translate it for them. But God had the words on large stones, in their own language, so people could see them because we have a better visual memory than auditory memory – hence the use of video projection and PowerPoint everywhere.

So again I need to read God's Word for myself in a version that I can understand.

### **God's Word Is Reliable**

And another reason for not taking what someone else says as what the Bible says. People are unreliable, but the Bible is Reliable, God's Word Is Reliable.

Verse 3

“Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.”  
(Deuteronomy 27:3 NIV)

God spoke it and it came to be – his word is reliable. The Bible is reliable – but we then have to read it to find out what it says. In 2005 a census carried out found that only 27% of churchgoers read the Bible at least weekly apart from the church. How can we even begin to know if the Bible is reliable if we do not even read it?

In the next chapter of Deuteronomy, you might like to read this at home this afternoon are the blessings and cursing that would occur if the obeyed or did not obey the commands of God. They were reliable because God has said it.

The Old Testament talks about the coming of a Messiah, one who would come and die to take away the sins of those who follow him and show this by their obedience to a Godly lifestyle which they find in the Bible. This has come true in Christ. This is reliable, let us keep digging ourselves, keep reading to find out all the other reliable things that the Bible says.

### **God's Word is Compulsory**

Then finally we read in verse 10

“Obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today.” (Deuteronomy 27:10 NIV)

God's Word is Compulsory. The Bible is not an invite on how to live, but an order on the way we live

To read the Bible is not enough – it is to do what it says. Something we do not like in our culture these days. “No one tells me what to do, I am my own person.”

So we need to read the Bible because it is

- Permanent
  - Understandable
  - Reliable
  - Compulsory
- 
- If we say that the Bible was alright in the past and not for today (remembering the parts that Jesus fulfilled so that no longer apply to us – we are in danger of tearing those parts out of the Bible – All the Bible is permanent.
  - If we say that I have to read it in a version I cannot understand, or I choose not to read it because I will not understand it – then we can tear some more pages out. The Bible is Understandable, maybe at times we will need help, but what is the point of God writing a book that people cannot understand!
  - If we say that the Bible is so old, at least 2000 years old plus, then it cannot speak into today and God is not the same today, so what it says is suspect, then we can tear out some more pages. But the Bible is always reliable, always up to date, we just have to apply its principles to our lives today.
  - If we say that I can live as I want to, so I don't need to follow the Bible. In fact I don't even have to read the Bible, I can just go to church, then we tear out more pages from the Bible – the Bible that is compulsory to follow. We also run the grave risk of having the cursing rain down us that are spoken about in the Bible.

Today is Bible Sunday. My prayer is, my hope in God is, that far more than 27% of people here will read their Bible at home on their own, more than once before we meet again next Sunday. The best book in the world is to be read, not made to gather dust; it is to be followed even when that means difficult choices, not ignored; it is to be revered and given its rightful place in our lives.