

Deuteronomy 30:9-14 *Then the Lord your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your ancestors, ¹⁰if you obey the Lord your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹¹Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹²It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹⁴No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.*

Dear friends,

Have you ever looked at a person's expression and wondered, "What is he really thinking? I hear what he is saying, but I don't know what he is saying!" Communication is getting across the message we mean to get across. Sometimes even when we say words, we don't communicate exactly what we mean. Someone can tell you what they think, but you're left wondering if they really feel that way or which way they are really leaning on the subject. Someone might give you directions for something, but you walk away completely confused and in the dark not fully understanding what was being asked of you.

You never have to wonder what God is thinking. Yes, for our benefit God does keep some things that we don't need to know hidden from us. But God has revealed to us in the Bible all that we need to know for our salvation and all that we need to know to live as his people. People use the excuse that God's word is confusing or too deep for them. They excuse their sinful lives by claiming that they couldn't understand what God wants from them. But God's message is very clear. It's not so high that we can't understand it. It's not so far away that can't grasp it. It's not so deep that we can't fathom it. God wants us not only to believe in him for our salvation but to let his word live in our lives as an expression of the relationship he has established with us. He doesn't want you to be confused or unclear. **God's Word is Very Near You.**

Deuteronomy is often referred to as Moses' last will and testament. It records the final words which Moses spoke to Israel before God took him to heaven. The nation was standing at the banks of the Jordan River about to enter into the land God had promised to them which was flowing with milk and honey. With his last address to these people, Moses recalled the blessings God had provided to them, from his grace in calling them from Egypt to his providing for them in desert and their victories over their enemies. He renewed the covenant God had made with the people and encouraged them to carefully follow the terms of this covenant. God would bring his blessings to those who obeyed his commands and lived as his people. But those who turned away from God and followed after the foreign gods of their land would bring curses upon themselves. Moses wanted the people to prosper. He wanted them to know God's blessings. With these being Moses' last words to the people, we understand how important they were. This was his last encouragement: Don't just know about God's will...live it. These weren't blessings the people would earn as if they were somehow earning favor before God by following his commands. These were blessings that would come naturally when they followed what God said. They couldn't claim that they didn't know what God wanted of them or understood what he had said to them. God's Word was very near to them. They knew it. They understood it. Moses now encouraged them to be faithful to it, cling tightly to the Lord and live as his people confident God's blessings would be there.

These words Moses spoke to Israel before he left this earth were recorded for our purposes today. They are strong words of encouragement for us to live as God's people. As God delighted in Israel, so he delights in us. He delights in us not because of who we are nor what we have done. He delights in us because in his grace, this is what he has chosen to do. Israel is a great example of this. We know about their grumbling and complaining ways. They failed to trust God would protect them as they entered into the land of Canaan. At various times as they wandered through the wilderness they turned away from the Lord and engaged in the immoral practices of heathen gods. Yet like the father in the story of the prodigal son in our Gospel lesson for today, God still loved them. He delighted in them. In his grace he had chosen them to be his people. He forgave them when they repented and turned back to him. He promised his blessings to them when they followed his commands and obeyed what he said. He wanted them to be prosperous and successful.

God wants the same for you and me. He hasn't been unclear to us about his word and his will. Sometimes people will talk to me about not being able to understand the Bible unless I explain it to them. Maybe you feel this way too...that you have to have a Seminary education to really understand what God is saying and what he wants of us. But this isn't true. God's message is clear and simple. Salvation is ours through Jesus alone. Whoever believes in Jesus as their Savior from sin will live with him forever. Yes, like the Israelites, we have often turned away from God and rejected his will for us. We have fallen to the temptations of the world around us and engaged in activities that go directly against what God says. We've hurt people in our anger, placed our confidence in our own abilities, had lustful thoughts, over indulged in food and drink, lied, betrayed confidences and the list goes on. Yet, God in his grace chose us to be his people. And for no other reason that this is what he was delighted in his grace and mercy to do. He sent his son Jesus to suffer and die for our sins and sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts to plant the seed of faith and grow it into maturity. Our relationship with the Lord was not something that we had to achieve by great efforts such as ascending to heaven or crossing the sea. It didn't come by a secret wisdom that came from exotic places or through those who searched the universe. The simple word which God

shared with us provides us with all we need for salvation: *For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" (John 3:16)

God's word is very near us. He has planted it in our hearts and continues to grow it as we hear His Word. That word is not only clear about the path to salvation, but is also very clear about what God wants of us as his people. God wants our lives to be living expressions of our relationship with him—sounding from our lips, glowing in our hearts and shining in our lives. God wants his word to live in us. Because we know of God's deep and amazing love for us he wants us to reflect that as we live in love for him and for one another. Because we know of the salvation that is ours in Jesus, God wants to be active in keeping his commands—not to earn his blessings but confident his blessings will be there when we live as God's people. Our second lesson today clearly reminds us that God wants the believer to live a life of faith in joyful response to the Lord's goodness. That means shunning what is evil and embracing what is good. Loving our neighbor means embodying the love of Christ and sharing with those in need. Jesus in our gospel lesson connects love for God with our love for our neighbor. As Jesus has had compassion on us, so we are to have compassion on others, especially those in need, even if they are our enemy. God planted his word in our hearts not only to believe in Jesus as our Savior but so that we can live that word in our lives.

It's interesting that this text stands before us today. Our synod met in convention this past week in New Ulm, MN. I listened via Livestream to the keynote essay which dealt with this very topic. The keynote focused on adapting our mission to the culture which we live in today. Showing love to our neighbor and being hospitable and neighborly is one of the best ways we can carry out our mission of sharing Jesus with our world. Loving our neighbor means understanding our neighbor's culture and finding ways to share Jesus with that culture. Today, people in our culture are looking for family and connection. The average unchurched person today isn't looking for a church. They couldn't care less about a church. But they are looking for family and a connection to people...and we as the Church can give them that. The speaker gave a great example of this using the illustration of a boater. He said this: Let's pretend that I don't like to go out on boats. I have no desire to do that. I couldn't care less about boating. Having someone share with me that they can give me a new contemporary boat instead of an older, functional boat isn't going to convince me to like boating. But now you as my neighbor ask me to go on the boat with you. After I tell you no thanks, you go on to share with me how peaceful it is out on the water and how it calms your mind to escape to the water for a little bit and you invite me again just to give it a try...I might try it. Trying to change things within the church to make us more contemporary or less formal isn't going to convince someone to come join us on Sunday morning. They don't care about that. But taking the time to get to know your neighbor, showing them love, inviting them for dinner from time to time, helping them in times of trouble or when they need a helping hand might give you the chance to invite them to come with you to church. When they say no, you can share with them the peace you have in knowing sins are forgiven. You can share with them how calming it is to be reminded that God loves you and what joy you have knowing the eternity God has waiting for you. And if you ask them to just give it a try, hey might come. Why? Because you have loved them. You have connected with them. You have shown them that you care for them and given them a reason.

The question isn't asking what God wants of us. He's very clear about this. His Word is very near us. He wants us to love one another. He wants us to be loving toward those in need. He wants us to care about each other, connect with each other and serve one another. The hard part isn't knowing what God wants. The hard part is actually doing what God wants. What are we doing either collectively or individually to get to know one another and connect with one another? What are we doing to be hospitable toward others? How are we working to connect with people to give us the opportunity to invite them to learn more about Jesus? God has promised his blessings when we obey his commands and follow his word. Are we doing all that we can to love each other and the world around us as a reflection of God's love for us?

The truth is that sometimes we hide behind ignorance of God's will as an excuse to not follow his will. At times we purposefully avoid growing in God's Word so that we can claim ignorance and not follow his word. Often, we seek to follow God's will but not as a response to God's word and love for us but by turning it into a formula for success to please God as we ignore His grace. At one time or another we have to admit that like the Israelites, we too have turned from God's grace and deserve his punishment in hell. But the Father has chosen to delight in us. Like the prodigal son, he opens his arms to us as we repent of our sins. He forgives us. He restores us and rejoices in us, not because of who we are but because of what Jesus has done for us. This is our joy and our delight. Our joyful response is to reflect God's love for us into our love for others as we seek to follow his will and obey his commands.

God is very clear in what he wants of us. He sends the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith, to provide the power to believe, to repent and to produce works of obedience. The Savior makes his forgiveness available wherever people hear, read, study and learn the Word of God. It's not enough to know God and what God wants...it's also important that we do what God wants. May God send the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts to know and do what God wants of us and help us to trust that when we do, his blessings will be there. God's Word isn't unknown to us. It isn't too high for us and it isn't too far away from us. Thankfully, it is very near us. Amen.