Love The LORD Your God

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Key Verses 6:4,5 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

 In Mark’s gospel chapter 12, one of the teachers of the law came to Jesus and asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” Jesus answered, “The most important one is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mk 12:28-30) According to Jesus’ words, today’s key verse is the greatest commandment among all God’s commands. This is not only the key verse of today’s passage, but also the main theme of Deuteronomy. ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself is also the summary of the Ten Commandments, which we studied two weeks ago. God gave these commands to the Israelites through Moses, while they were at Mount Nebo, just before they entered the promised land. These commands gave them spiritual direction and blessing after they started their new life in the promised land. These commands also give spiritual direction to all of us who prepare for the new semester, especially to those who are starting their college life as freshmen. Proverbs 1:7 says, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction*.” May God bless us when we study this passage and give us ears to hear and hearts to obey. Amen.

In 5:30-6:3 God promised his blessings to the Israelites when they observe his commands. Look at verses 6:1-3. “***These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Here, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you***.” What are God’s blessings upon the Israelites when they observe his commands? They are long life, safety, and prosperity in the promised land. All these are what people today pursue and desire to gain: good health, safety, and success. In the beginning, all of these were given to men by God as free gifts. But men lost the privilege to enjoy them when they fell for Satan’s temptation and disobeyed God’s command. (Ge 3:1-24) God promised all these blessings to the Israelites on the condition that they observe God’s commands. All these blessings come from the Lord. Proverbs 3:16 says, “*Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor*.” Jesus Christ taught this to his disciples, who worried about what to eat and what to wear in Matthew 6:33, “*But seek first his (God’s) kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*”

 God promised to bless his people with these blessings. But, all these physical and material blessings should not be our goal or purpose. We must not love God’s blessings more than God, who is the provider and the source of blessing. Otherwise, we are like children who only enjoy gifts, and forget the one who gave us the gifts. What did God say to his people? Look at verses 4,5. “***Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength***.” Here, the word ‘hear’ is ‘*shema’* in Hebrew, which means ‘listen and obey’. God wanted his people to listen his commands carefully and obey them. The reason why Adam failed in Satan’s temptation was that he did not listen to God’s commands carefully and did not obey it absolutely. God’s command is not optional, like advice or recommendations which we can choose to listen to or not, but is fatal when we do not obey. This is a matter of life and death.

What does it mean that the Lord is one? It means that the Lord our God is the only true God in this world. There were many gods in Egypt and in the land of Canaan, where they would be entering. But there is only one true God whom they had to worship. These days there are many gods in this world. In Japan there are 8 million gods. We live in the so-called age of relativistic pluralism. There are many religions on this earth, more than TV and cable channels. But there is the only one true living God and one real religion in which we can trust. People are confused about whose God is the real god and whose religion is the real religion. I believe that the true God should be almighty and provide the way of salvation. Buddha failed to provide the way of salvation because he himself said, “No one saves us, but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path.” He only taught us how to control our emotions and to purify our feelings through deep meditation. The word ‘Allah’ means ‘God’ in Arabic. Muslim say that Allah is the same God as the God of the Christians. But this is not true. Allah, whom they believe to be God is different from the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Israel, the God of David, the God of Daniel, the God of Jesus Christ, and the God of the Apostle Paul, and God whom we believe and follow. Islam denies the Holy Trinity. Allah is singular, a single god like ‘*El*’ or ‘*Elah*’ in Hebrew. But our ‘God’ in Deuteronomy 6:4,5 is “*Elohim*” plural in Hebrew. Islam denies Christ’s Divine Incarnation. Muslim rejects Jesus’ death and resurrection. Quran even allows killing those who believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. How is Allah the same God who sent Jesus Christ his One and Only Son? The Lord God, our God, who is the only true God, who created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, loved us so much that he provided for us the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. There is no other way for us to be saved but through faith in Jesus. Acts 4:12 says, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved*.” We may have many ways to go to Chicago. Some may go to Chicago by airplane. Others may go there by driving on highway 55. Still others may take a train to go to downtown in Chicago. But, there is the only one way for us to get to heaven, which is through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ himself said, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*.” (Jn 14:6) Jesus meant that there is the only one way for us to be saved. Then, why is Jesus the only way to God and for our salvation? It is because Jesus is the only one who died for our sins. He is the only one mediator between God and men for salvation. In the past, a high priest killed animals and entered into God’s holy temple every year in order to atone for his sin and the people’s sin. The high priest was a mediator between God and his people. The high priest took animals’ blood and entered into the Holy Place every year. But, Christ Jesus became our high priest, took his own blood, and entered into God’s kingdom. (He 9:12) He died once for all for the sins of the world. The blood of Jesus has power to cleanse the sins of the world. (He 9:28,1Jn 1:7) Buddha didn’t die for us. Muhammad didn’t die for your sins. Socrates didn’t sacrifice his life for our transgressions. Only Jesus, who was sent from the Father God, died for us. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, “*For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus*.”

Ravi Zacharias, the India-born American evangelist and Christian apologist, drank poison when he was 17 years old. He confessed that he tried to kill himself because he had no meaning in his life. He was found half dead and sent to the emergency room. At the hospital, the young Ravi heard John 14:19, “*Because I live, you also will live.*” He prayed, “Jesus, if you are real then let me get out of this hospital, I will devote myself to you.” Later, Ravi’s family moved to Canada and he became a pastor. Ravi said that every major religion claims its exclusiveness about truth, but Christian faith is the only one which is able to answer all these four questions: Origin, the meaning of life, morality, and destiny. Like Ravi Zacharias, I also wandered in the darkness of uncertainty and anxiety of life. I didn’t know why I had to live on this earth, if death is the end of everything. But I came to know that my life came from God and is going back to him. My life has absolute meaning and purpose in God, my Creator. My life was given not at random, but created for God’s good purpose. Jesus not only opened the way for me to go to heaven, but also opened my spiritual eyes to see my life and the world from God’s point of view. The Lord our God, the Lord is one. He is the God of Jesus Christ, the God of Moses and the God of Israel.

The words, “Lord is one” is the positive expression of the words, “*You shall have no other gods before me*” in the Ten Commandments. (Ex 20:3, Deut 5:7) We should not worship idols. God is the only one who is worthy of our devotion, love, and loyalty. Our God deserves to be worshiped and glorified because he made us and saved us. There were many idols in the time of Moses. There are many idols these days which steal our hearts and tempt us to worship them. Our God is a jealous God. He becomes jealous when we worship other things, because he loves us. The Lord is one, not many. We have only one God and one mediator between God and us, who is Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now, what does God say to the Israelites? Read verse 5 again, “***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength***.” To love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength means to love God with our whole being. It indicates our total commitment toward God with trust and obedience. This command seems to be impossible to obey. It is true that it is impossible to keep and obey this command. This also does not mean that we quit our jobs and sit down thinking about God all day long, either. How can we love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength 24/7? With what is impossible with men is possible with God. (Mt 19:26, Lk 18:27) God made this possible through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. (Ro 8:4) With what is impossible for us to make righteous by observing the law, Jesus made it possible through his obedient death on the cross. When he said on the cross, “It is finished”, he meant that he had fulfilled his mission, completed to satisfy God’s requirement for men’s righteousness through his death on the cross. (Jn19:30) We become righteous before God when we believe in Jesus Christ and in his blood. (Ro 3:25) When we depend on Jesus and are led by the Holy Spirit, we can love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength. Our righteousness does not come from our perfect observance of God’s law, but from our faith in Jesus Christ and His promise. (Ro 1:17) The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is our advocate, helper, and comforter, who enables us to love God.

What can we do when we love God? Jesus said in John 14:15, “*If you love me, keep my commands*.” He continues in John 14:23, “*Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching*.” Jesus reinstated the erring Peter at the Sea of Galilee, “*Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?... Feed my lambs*.” (Jn 21:15) Jesus repeated the same questions and answers two more times. Do you really love Jesus more than yourself and all things related to this world? Feed Jesus’ sheep.

Loving God with all our heart and soul and strength is not only for us, but also for our children and their children after them. Look at verses 6-9. “***These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.***” The covenant which God had made with Abraham was inherited to his descendants. Our God is the everlasting God and his covenant is the everlasting covenant. This is the reason why we teach the word of God to our children and to children after them. This is the reason why we study the Bible, write testimonies, memorize Bible verses, and struggle to obey Jesus’ commands. This is the reason why I put some Bible verses in each room of this Bible house.

Verses 10-25 teaches his people ways to preserve God’s command. It summarizes with two main instructions: First, remember God when things go well with you. (10-12) Don’t forget God who brought them out of Egypt and out of slavery and remember that all blessings came from the Lord God, not from themselves. In fact, the land where they would possess was not cultivated by them, and the cities where they would live in were not built by their ancestors. They only would possess God’s blessing and enjoy them. People cry out for God’s help and blessing when they are desperately in need. But after everything goes well with them and when they are well fed and satisfied, they forget God and their past suffering. We should not do so.

Second, fear the Lord God and serve him only (13-25) Look at verse 13. “***Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name***.” This is the additional instruction of verse 4. They must not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around them. This is because the Lord our God is a jealous God and his anger would burn against them. They should not put the Lord God to the test as their ancestors did at Masaah (Meribah) (Ex 17:7, Ps 106:32) The Israelites camped in the desert. They quarreled with Moses and complained to God because they were thirsty. Moses rebuked them saying, “*Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test*?” God commanded Moses to strike a rock at the Mount Horeb, and then water gushed out from the rock. Moses called the place *Masaah*, which means ‘testing’, and *Meribah* which means ‘quarrelling.’ (Ex 17:1-7)

 When we are in the time of trials, we must not deny our God. We must have faith in God. When we are in the time of blessing, we must remember God. Jesus defeated Satan’s temptation with these words of Deuteronomy. (Mt 4:1-11, Lk 4:1-13) We must fear God and serve him only. The Lord our God is one. He is the only living and true God. Let us love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength and love our neighbor as ourselves. I pray that we all may keep this command as our spiritual direction for new semester as well as for all our entire life. Amen!