

¹² And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

¹⁴ To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. ¹⁵ Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today. ¹⁶ Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. ¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. ¹⁸ He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. ¹⁹ And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. ²⁰ Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. ²¹ He is the one you praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. ²² Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.

What would you say?

If you were able to preach at your funeral what would you say? Certainly you could say some nice things, look back on life at your accomplishments, or maybe you would take the time to address your family and give them advice on how to carry on in a world without you. But, you will never have the opportunity to speak at your own funeral because of the obvious fact: you're dead. Even if you put your words in writing there is no guarantee that what you want will actually be said. In reality you wouldn't be saying much.

There is one man who did preach his own funeral: Moses. Moses was the leader of God's people Israel. While he could have mentioned some nice things about himself or brought up a long list of accomplishments but he didn't instead he gives them advice as they are about to enter the Promised Land. He urges Israel and even us to fear the Lord, to walk in his commands, to love the Lord, to serve him with every last beat of our heart, and keep his

commandments. This wasn't in order that they might be God's chosen nation but it was because they already were God's chosen people.

That's the same situation we are in. God has chosen you. You are precious blood bought soul. You are one for whom Christ died. What would you say? Probably something similar to Moses as you point people back to God.

But maybe not to the extent of Moses, you might not write a book, 34 chapters of the past 40 years. Moses speaks to Israel the Law and the Promises. He is brutally honest when it comes to the reality of their situation as God's chosen people: *it wasn't because of their righteousness that they are going to possess the land, but because of the wickedness of the nations around them... Moses says, "You are a stubborn people... time and again you provoked the Lord... you rebelled against God... God was ready to destroy you."*

Moses is preaching a funeral and I'm almost certain that Israel would rather have heard how they've faithfully followed the Lord for 40 years while wandering in the desert. How they were tried, tested, proved and found faithful. They are the ones who are able to enter the Promised Land. Maybe they would even want to hear about Moses – God's chosen leader who spoke face to face with God as a man to his friend but they would find one obvious omission: Moses can't enter the Promised Land because of his sin.

Moses tells them what they already know, the requirements of the law. They were not to just go through the motions but their hearts should be in the proper place as well. *You are to serve your God with all your heart and with all your soul and this is for your good.* God gave these commands for their good. They should love the law. *Circumcise their hearts and be no longer stubborn.* If the heart is in the proper place then the actions will follow. So Moses urges them to look at their hearts, their actions, because God does not show favoritism even among his own people nor does he accept bribes. He is a just God. That's what Moses says at his funeral.

But I don't have time for a 34 chapter sermon today nor is it my funeral either, but we have the same just God who does not show favoritism nor does he take bribes. Everything that we have is his and everything that exists is his. He is a great and mighty God who judges justly. And a just judge doesn't just look at the highlights of life. A judge doesn't look at the volunteer work of the individual, how his or her parents have done, but they judge according to the crime committed.

But if that criminal were us we would like to hear good things rather than bad. That's why funerals have turned into celebrations of life which look at past accomplishments and point family back to how they want to be remembered. We could have people stand up and say all sorts of nice things but there would be one obvious omission: The dead are dead. Ezekiel tells us why, "*The soul who sins is the soul who will die*" (Ezekiel 18:20). They, you, I aren't good. We're sinful and in need of a Savior.

But like Israel you probably already know that. The sad part however is when we begin to associate chosen with privileged. That happens when we set up our own throne, kingdom, and imagine we are special. That sneaks into our lives, our actions, and even our gifts. Some give gifts so they can be remembered rather than give glory to God. God can use our gifts or set them aside and if God chooses to gain glory through our death, he can do that as well. We are his servants. We are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, to serve God with our heart and all our life. That is one of many things I have not done. I have not loved the law. I have not served God with all my heart and all my soul. I too will die because I am a sinner.

The one we serve is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the great God – Mighty and awesome. He shows no favoritism nor does he take any bribes. Not even Israel – God's chosen nation was spared. But doom and gloom is not the final message from Moses. That's not our funeral.

We don't eulogize in the Lutheran Church. We can say nice things about people but we dare not focus on the individual because we will always come to the same conclusion of guilty.

Instead of celebrating the life of the departed, idolizing their life – we celebrate the only life worth celebrating: Jesus. Much of Deuteronomy flows from the context of a gracious God who delivers and forgives. This section of Deuteronomy is very heavy on the word, "you" and even "your." 14 times Moses mentions "your." Not only with "*your hearts, your soul*" but also with "*your God*" – and it is by his name that you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen."

Even at his funeral, Moses points back to God's Work and God's Promises, God's glory, God's accomplishments. God has kept every single promise, including the fact that he would make them a great nation. But that promise of

people and land is only a prelude to God's greatest promise given in the Garden of Eden, "The seed of woman would destroy the devil's work, crush his head." It was through that seed of woman: Jesus that God would fulfill his promise to Abraham, "*All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*" When Simeon held Jesus in his arms he proclaimed fulfilled, "I have seen your salvation which you have prepared for every people." God sent his son to live among us and to suffer and die for us. Jesus is your praise. He is your glory.

Just as Israel so also with you. You have been brought out of Egypt. You've been given a new heart. You've been bought back from slavery to sin. Not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood, his innocent suffering and death. It's easy to love the one who has given his life for us. What would you say? When we see someone in all of their glory that's someone you want to associate with.

And yet Jesus in his glory comes to us, forgives our sin, our attempts to steal or keep some glory for ourselves, and he calls us Children of God and that is what we are.

God didn't choose you because of the gifts you bring God, the work you do around the church, or the support you offer your pastor. But for the same reason he chose Israel – Not because of your righteousness but because of his mercy. And you can swear by his name. Hold him to his promises. Remember his work, point back to his promises fulfilled: we have a savior from sin Jesus. He is our praise. He is our glory. Then you can go to those still in Egypt, still in slavery, and point them to their Savior.

What would you say? I know what I would. If there is one thing I want my children and someday my grandchildren to remember it's not the sinner who stands before them but their savior who has suffered, died, and rose again for them. That's the same God Moses points Israel back to. The same God that will carry them on into the Promised Land. The same God who says life doesn't end in the grave but he will restore our bodies to be like his glorious body in heaven. Amen.