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Sermon

August 8th, Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

To the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One who is, who was, and is to come, to Him be glory forever amen. (Rev 1:8 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy, the first 9 verses:

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak. Let the earth hear the sayings from my mouth. ² Let my teaching drop down like rain, and let my sayings distill like dew, like raindrops on grass, like showers on green plants. ³ Yes, I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Ascribe greatness to our God. ⁴ He is the Rock! Perfect is his work. Indeed all of his ways are justice. He is a faithful God. He does no wrong. Righteous and upright is he. ⁵ Israel acted corruptly against him. They are not his children. That is their fault. They are a twisted and crooked generation. ⁶ Is this how you repay the LORD, you foolish people, who are not wise? Is he not your father, who created you, who made you and established you? ⁷ Remember the days of the distant past. Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father and he will tell you about it. Ask your elders and they will describe it to you. ⁸ When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he separated the children of Adam, he established the boundaries for peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. ⁹ But the allotment for the LORD is his people. Jacob is the territory that is his possession.

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

What have you've been watching lately? These are the dog days of summer. Networks usually come up with certain gimmicks this time of year. People are largely away from home. The eye-magnet that is Football doesn't start for another month. There is largely nothing worth watching this time of year.

But this year, the Olympic games fill in and filled our screens. You can watch countless hours of various competitions going on at the Olympics. You know the routine. A person or a team of people represent their nation. When they win, there is a medal ceremony. The victor's flag flies while their national anthem is played. It is a proud moment for the person or team, as it is for the country that they represent.

It takes hard work to win a gold. It takes talent. It takes discipline. It takes years of training. Then it takes seizing the moment and leaving it all out there.

Many of us will never know what it truly takes to be athletically great. But we, as Christians, are all

marathon runners. We all strive to run the race. **Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. (1Co 9:24 NKJ)**

In our text this morning, Moses was about to cross his faith finish line. Before he does so, he sings an anthem. It is not one of personal or national glory. Quite the opposite. It is an anthem of instruction. A song of doctrine, a hymn of remembrance. This is the Anthem for Righteousness. It was written from the Word, it contrasts perfection from corruption, and it is sung by a people gathered together from the LORD!

We pray: LET THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATION OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT, O LORD, OUR ROCK AND REDEEMER. AMEN!

The backstory of this song is interesting. This was a time of transition for the chosen people of the LORD. They were about to finally enter the promised land.

They had the opportunity to do so 40 years prior. But instead of rising up and taking what the LORD had promised them, they rebelled and wanted to choose a new leader to lead them back to Egypt.

The leader whom they wanted to replace 40 years prior was Moses. The years of wandering in wilderness had taken a toll. He too would not be entering into this land. God explained this at the end of this chapter. **This will happen because you broke faith with me among the people of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin, by not treating me as holy among the people of Israel. 52 You may view the land from a distance, but you will not go into the land that I am giving to the people of Israel."**

Moses had gotten frustrated at Meribah. Once again, water from a rock was going to pour forth. God instructed him to speak at the rock, and water would come out. Instead, Moses struck the rock twice with his rod, and said, **"Listen now, you rebels! Must we bring water out of this rock for you?" Numbers 20:10** The Holy LORD's Word was to accomplish this, but Moses took it upon himself out of frustration. As a result, he would die on the doorstep of the promised land.

Frustration is a good word to summarize Moses' shepherding of Israel. The LORD had saved them from slavery, starvation, exhaustion, and exposure. Yet, the people were always quick to forget these things and panic at the first sign of trouble. They would rebel, then the LORD's anger would burn against them, they would repent and turn to Moses to plead to the LORD, he would do so, and the LORD would relent. This cycle would repeat itself over and over.

Moses' leading would finally come to an end. But the LORD wanted him to leave them with something. A special song. A national anthem if you will. God explained the reasoning for the song. **"Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of**

their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them." (Deu 31:21 NKJ)

A good song usually has a good story behind it. Take for instance, the song that gets played whenever our country wins in the Olympics, *The Star-Spangled Banner*. It's author, Francis Scott Key, penned the anthem while witnessing the battle of Baltimore during the war of 1812. He describes the feelings he witnessed while seeing the battered worn, yet triumphant flag of fort McHenry flying. Moses' song was not inspired by a physical battle, rather the war of attrition that was wandering in the wilderness. His life experience and perspective are certainly here. But it wasn't the inspiration of war that penned these words, rather the Holy inspiration of the LORD Himself!

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak. Let the earth hear the sayings from my mouth. ² Let my teaching drop down like rain, and let my sayings distill like dew, like raindrops on grass, like showers on green plants.

When Moses first spoke these words, he did so in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel. But note, he does not address Israel at first. Rather, first he invokes heaven and earth to listen to him. Moses takes his people out of it. This is a universal truth that he is singing, and if the people do not hear, creation itself would hold them in judgement.

We are truly in the dog days of summer. You don't need to turn on the TV to know this. Just look around you. We live in the "evergreen" state. But it doesn't feel like it right now. Overnight we finally had rain. It's been about 55 days since we have had measurable rain.

Moses compares his words to rain, dew, raindrops, and showers. The Israelites knew what it was like to go without water. Those were times when they would panic and rebel. You can't live without water. If you have livestock and crops, they need to be watered. But you don't need to be a farmer to understand the vital nature of water. No one can live long without it.

That is how we are to think about the word of God. Sure, you can go a while without it, but you're going to be miserable. You can't be productive while you are severely dehydrated. God's Word needs to be a daily dose of our lives. **"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, 11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isa 55:10-11 NKJ)**

Like the thirsty plant, we too need to be watered by the Word. That is what Moses is leaving them with. Not his own opinions or sentiments, but the Word of the LORD Himself.

This song served several purposes. But first, Moses makes the point to describe how great God is. **Yes, I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Ascribe greatness to our God. 4 He is the Rock! Perfect is his work. Indeed all of his ways are justice. He is a faithful God. He does no wrong. Righteous and upright is he.**

I like how he phrases it. **"Ascribe greatness to our God"**. By saying this, he is saying, "I can't say anything new about how great God is. He is the definition of greatness. All I can do is ascribe it to Him."

There is a very deliberate reason for stating how great God is here. Moses is effusive in his praise. Look at the repeated terms. **He is the Rock, His work is perfect, all His ways are justice, He is faithful, He does no wrong, He is righteous and upright.** Moses hammers these points home.

It is certainly always good to remember how great our LORD is. But Moses does this for a reason. He paints the backdrop of God's greatness to contrast Him against these Israelites. **5 Israel acted corruptly against him. They are not his children. That is their fault. They are a twisted and crooked generation.**

6 Is this how you repay the LORD, you foolish people, who are not wise? Is he not your father, who created you, who made you and established you?

This song which Moses sings leaves Israel out. But here now, they are drawn back into it in the third person. THEY. They are not his children, they are twisted, crooked. You would think that the parting swan song of the leader would be kind words, spoken in fondness of the people he loved and cared about. But this song does not sugar coat anything. It's quite sugar free; you might even call it salty. Moses gives them Law here.

What if your Pastor said something similar to you? **Is this how you repay the LORD, you foolish people, who are not wise?** Those are pretty harsh words. If I got up here, and accused you of repaying the LORD's kindness with wickedness like this, how would you take it? Pretty harsh pastor...

But wouldn't it be accurate? Haven't we all been guilty of repaying the loving LORD with evil instead of good? Is that not what sin is? The LORD is gracious, good, and giving. Everything we have is from His hand. And we, in turn, go about our lives like the children of Israel did; quick to panic and rebel and forget all that He has done for us and promised to us. We are sinful. We too are twisted and crooked; He is righteous and upright. Every time we sin, it is an open act of rebellion against the Most-High God. These sins twist and warp us. You are your own worst enemy because you are a sinner by nature.

Truly, we all get what is coming to us. Death. That is what sin produces after all. Moses died. He died because he sinned. You can say that same thing about every single person who ever lived on this earth. With, of course, a few exceptions. We know the Enoch and Elijah did not experience death. But there would be another exception. One who experienced death but overcame it. One of whom Moses would prophesy.

Moses was a big fan of Christian education. He wrote the first 5 books of the Bible for this reason. But, he was also all about oral history, parents telling their children their church history. It was important that the Words of the LORD would be passed down from generation to generation. Here he implores the people to ask the elders about the past. ⁷ **Remember the days of the distant past. Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father and he will tell you about it. Ask your elders and they will describe it to you.**

The days of Israel distant past have been the various texts we have had the past couple of months. Through them, we saw how God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that they would be a great nation, and that they would possess the land of Canaan. But they were also promised something greater, rather someone greater. Through them, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Moses promised them the same thing: **I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. (Deu 18:18 NKJ)**

The history of Israel all pointed ahead to Jesus. He would come and fulfill all the commandments that neither Moses nor his people followed. The writer to the Hebrews wrote: **5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. (Heb 3:5-6 NKJ)**

"Whose house we are..." We are the house; we are the people! Moses' song wasn't just sung to the nation of Israel, it was proclaimed to the heavens and the earth. Yes, these people were about to enter the holy land. But, the nation of Israel is not a place, it's a people. You are those people! ⁹ **But the allotment for the LORD is his people. Jacob is the territory that is his possession.**

How is this possible? How can it be that we sinful sinners, doomed in our sins, have been made the people of God? JESUS is the answer! Jesus was born out of the people of Israel and would redeem us! Peter writes: **But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1Pe 2:9-10 NKJ)**

One of the most interesting parts of the Olympics is the opening ceremonies. It's always interesting to see all the different nations walk in. You see all the flags of nations you have never even heard of before. But some athletes walk in with just a generic Olympic flag. What is their deal? They are known as the Refugee Olympic Team. Their athletes come from many different nations around the world. They have had to flee from their countries for various reasons, but they come together to compete with the rest of the world.

I think they are a good picture for what the Church of God is. We all have our places of origin, our countries that we live in. But we are all essentially refugees. We are displaced here in this world. This is not our real home. This is not our real nation. Our real home is in heaven. Our real nation is Israel, not the country in the Middle East, but the spiritual Israel, God's own people! We are His!

We are His because He Himself redeemed us from sin and death. Here Moses says, **"Ascribe greatness to our God."** What better way to do that than to tell about how He found you, dead and your trespasses and sins, and made you to be alive through His means of grace. He has taken us out of the dung heap, where we truly belonged, and washed us with His holy blood and made us whiter than wool!

Jesus is the reason we are God's children and Jesus is the reason that God's children are His "allotment", that is, His portion, His possession, His own specially created chosen heritage. Do we

deserve this privilege? 1,000% not! But, that's is what grace is dear Christians, underserved loved! What was that absolution we received early in the liturgy? *God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has removed your guilt forever. You are His own dear child!*

Yes, the Olympics are something else. Nowhere else do you get to see the whole world compete like you do at the Olympic games. It can certainly make for some watchable moments.

Those athletes work extremely hard to get there. It takes hard work, talent, discipline, and years of training. So does being a Christian. But in a very different way. Hard work, talent, discipline, and training- by the Savior! He worked His whole entire life to get to the cross, He never sinned once. He had the talent, that is, He is true God and true Man. It took discipline, discipline to trust in His God and LORD for all things. And it took training. Jesus, the Savior, was constantly in the Word. And He is the Word.

We failed to qualify. But He wins the victory for you! Your Jesus has given you the crown of life, and no one will ever be able to take that away! When that final medal ceremony takes place, no flag will fly. It will simply be Jesus, His saints who he made clean through His blood, singing His praises into eternity. It is an opening ceremony with no end. Your place is there! Your gold medal of salvation was won for you by Jesus Christ your Savior. Therefore, let us always sing the anthem of righteousness, the songs that praise our God and LORD! AMEN!!!