**BUILDING A HOUSE FOR THE LORD**

**BUILDING ON THE BIBLE**

**Deuteronomy 6:1-25**

**INTRODUCTION**

How does God’s mission advance in the world? We know that God is on a mission to save people from every nation. He’s renewing cultures and transforming societies so that more and more people worship him as the one true and living God. He’s sending out evangelists, missionaries, and church planters to bring the gospel to the lost. He’s on a mission to renew his creation through his people until Christ returns and this age of sin and suffering comes to a close.

Our text today reminds us that God is also accomplishing his mission through parenting. It happens through the day-to-day discipleship that happens in our homes as we raise up our children. That happens as our children come to believe the gospel and follow Jesus for themselves, but it also happens as we establish strong, godly families that shine like little cities on a hill, radiating gospel truth and love to those around us.

That’s what the book of Deuteronomy is all about. Deuteronomy is about how God’s mission would advance as Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land. The challenge for them would be twofold: how would they maintain their distinct identity as God’s covenant people while also bearing witness to the nations that their God was the only true God?

One of the answers is that it would be through godly, Word-centered parenting. That’s how God’s people would both maintain their distinct identity and invite others to join them. That’s how God’s mission would advance.

The same is true today. God has sent us into the world to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. We are to be present in our culture for the sake of the mission, but separate from its ways for the sake of our holiness. We are to maintain our distinct identity as God’s covenant people *so that* the nations would hear the gospel through our words and see the gospel through our lives and come to worship God as well.

Our text today tells us that God’s mission advances when our families are built on the Bible. The people of God are preserved, and the mission of God advances, when parents faithfully teach their children the Bible.

The title of this sermon is **Building on the Bible.**

We will have three points today:

1. Teach and Talk (verses 1-9)
2. Take Care (verses 10-19)
3. Tell the Story (verses 20-25)

(1) **TEACH AND TALK** (verses 1-9)

Moses has three central exhortations in this chapter: fear the Lord, love the Lord, and obey the Lord. These are three separate but interrelated concepts. Moses calls Israel to fear the Lord in verses 2, 13, and 24. To fear the Lord is to live in reverential submission to God. It’s to tremble at his Word as we obey it. The command to love the Lord is found in verse 5. Jesus calls this the greatest commandment and the summary of the entire Law. We can’t obey God if we don’t love him; and we don’t love God if we don’t fear him.

Verse 2 is a good example of the connection between fearing God and obeying God:

**2**that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

It’s important for us to remember that fear, love, and obedience go together, because it tells the parents among us that we can’t just pick and choose what we pass on to our kids. Some parents are all about obedience. “God said it, so do it.” Other parents are all about love. “Oh, it doesn’t really matter how you live as long as you love God.” God’s Word tells us that we need to care equally about both. Teaching our kids to obey God means nothing if they don’t love him, and teaching our kids to love God means nothing if they don’t obey his commands.

Love and obedience must always go together. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) If we are to raise our kids to follow Jesus, we must teach them loving obedience.

That includes teaching them the truth of verse 4:

**4**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

This is what the Jews call the *shema*, a sacred prayer and declaration that their God, *Yahweh*, does not exist or reveal himself in many different forms. He doesn’t manifest himself as a fire and wind on Monday, and as a golden calf on Tuesday. He doesn’t reveal himself one way to Israel and another way to the Caananites. He is *one*, a perfect singularity, a divine being who has never changed and will never change. Israel was to hold fast to God as he had revealed himself in his Word, and not let the nations tell them otherwise.

We live in a modern day Canaan today. We are surrounded by the nations, and many of them have their own gods. Many of them would say, “We all worship the same God; we just understand a different part of him.” But God says no. He is *one*. He is who he has revealed himself to be in his Word, first to Israel, and now to the church. And if we are to raise our children up in the Lord, we are to teach them to give their exclusive allegiance to him, and to him alone.

What does that look like? How do we teach our kids to love, obey, and fear the Lord? Verse 6 says that it starts with the parents:

**6**And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

Moses is telling us that, if God’s Word is going to pass to our children, it must pass through our own hearts first. You might have tried the “do what I say, not what I do” parenting trick in the past. You don’t need me to tell you that it doesn’t work. All it does is it teaches our kids to do the same. It teaches them that it’s ok to live double lives. They can say one thing, and do another, because that’s what Mommy and Daddy do. God’s Word must pass through our hearts if it is to pass on to our children.

Verse 7 tells us how:

**7**You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

There is both structure and spontaneity in this verse. On the one hand, we are to teach God’s Word diligently to our children. Teaching involves a systematic process of building up knowledge. This is when we read the Bible with our kids at the breakfast table, or after dinner, or at bedtime; or we walk them through a catechism; or we introduce hymns to them that teach them the rich truths of God’s Word. We are to teach our children diligently.

We are also to talk of God’s Word in the every day moments that fill out the rest of the day. Verse 7 describes a life of sitting, walking, lying down, and rising up. Whatever we may be doing, from breakfast to bed time, we are taking every opportunity we have to talk about God’s Word.

That doesn’t mean we just cite Bible verses to get our kids so that they do what we want. It’s about naturally and consistently showing them the beauty, truth and goodness of God’s Word. Perhaps when you wake up in the morning, you’re praying the Lord’s Prayer to teach them to seek God’s will, God’s glory, and God’s provision. Or when you’re out on a hike admiring the Fall colours, you encourage your kids to look at what God has made. Or when you’re tucking your kids in at bedtime, you’re reminding them that God made them and loves them.

Verse 7 encourages us to take every opportunity we have to point our kids to God’s Word. That includes his commands. If one of your kids steals something from a classmate at school, you don’t just give them a lecture about how they know that’s wrong and that they should know better. You tell them that God commanded us not to steal, both for their good and the good of others. Or when your kids are fighting over the same toy, you don’t just tell them that sharing is caring. You tell them that God calls them to love one another and to put the interests of others above their own.

That’s why God’s Word needs to pass through our hearts before it can pass on to our children. If it’s not in our hearts, it won’t come to our minds, and we’ll have nothing biblical to say to our kids. But if it’s in our hearts, then it won’t matter if they’re sitting, walking, lying down, or rising. We’ll always have reason to point them to the beauty, truth, and goodness of God’s Word.

(2) **TAKE CARE** (verses 10-19)

But there are challenges to living like this, aren’t there? It could be laziness; we don’t have the willpower. It could be ignorance; we don’t have the knowledge. But our text gives us two barriers that we need to take special care in not letting them keep us from passing God’s Word onto our children. This leads to our second point.

The first barrier is prosperity. Verses 10-12:

**10**And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, **11**and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, **12**then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Fullness leads to forgetfulness. The fuller we are of God’s blessings, the easier it becomes to forget God’s commands. That’s what happened with Israel. At the end of the book, Moses writes a song that predicts Israel’s rebellion:

“But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.” – Deuteronomy 32:15

Prosperity can easily lead to idolatry, to forsaking God for another pleasure, because we convince ourselves that we don’t need God anymore. We already have everything that we want. The problem with the human heart is that we always find something else to worship, and we end up worshipping the work of our own hands. Whether it be statues we carve, or the businesses we build, or the careers we invest ourselves into developing, prosperity brings about the unique temptation to give up the worship of God for the worship of things.

Of course, there’s nothing wrong with prosperity *per se*. It’s the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil, not money itself. Even in these verses, it is God who’s giving his people prosperity. He’s giving them cities that they did not build, houses that they did not fill, cisterns that they did not dig, and vineyards that they did not plant, because he loves to give good things to his children. God’s not blaming them for having all these things, but he is warning them about the unique temptations that having these things will bring them.

They will be tempted to forget him, and if that happens, God’s Word will no longer pass on to their children because it’s not dwelling in their hearts. If we don’t address this, then slowly but surely, it’s only a matter of time before we convince ourselves that they don’t really need God. They don’t really need his Word. As long as they have a good job, a good house, and a good family, that’s fine! They have everything the world says they need, so they must have everything they want.

But God’s warning is clear in verses 13-15:

**13**It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. **14**You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— **15**for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

The consequences of idolatry are devastating, because we serve a God who is jealous for his own glory. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one”, and he will not share his glory with another. Prosperity may last for a time, but the day will come when it all comes crashing down. It is a fearful thing to fall in the hands of the living God, but that is what happens when we take God’s good gifts and turn them into idols.

When it’s not prosperity that’s tempting us to give up on God, it’s adversity. That’s the second barrier that keeps us from teaching and talking about God’s Word with our children. Verse 16:

**16**You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.

Massah is a reference to Exodus 17 when Israel complained that there wasn’t any water to drink after they escaped from Egypt. They put God to the test by forcing Moses to prove that God’s Word was true. What arrogance! Who did they think they were to make God prove that his Word was true? And yet, in his kindness, God provided for them. He gave them water from the rock and satisfied their thirst.

But here in verse 16, Moses tells them that they must not do so again. They must not put the Lord their God to the test by making him prove that he is trustworthy. God doesn’t have anything to prove to us. He is God, not us! His Word is perfect, infallible, and unchanging. He always keeps his promises.

So when we find ourselves in the desert of adversity and it seems like God has abandoned us, we must not put the Lord to the test either. If we do, we’re not going to pass on his Word to our children. We’ll have too many questions and doubts about it to do so. Instead, we must have an unshakeable confidence that God does what he says he will do.

Prosperity and adversity. They’re not only threats to our souls, but threats to our families as well. If we do not take care, they will keep us from trusting the Lord, and they will keep us from discipling our children.

This is a crucial chapter in the Bible. Not only did Jesus cite verse 5 as the greatest commandment, but he also cited verses 13 and 16 when Satan tempted him in the wilderness. Satan said, “Worship me!” But Jesus replied with verse 13. “It is the Lord your God you shall fear.” Satan said, “Throw yourself off the Temple and see if the angels will catch you.” Jesus replied with verse 16. “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”

This chapter was deeply ingrained in the heart and mind of our Saviour, and he used them to defeat temptation to stop trusting God and his Word. Now his disciples must do the same.

(3) **TELL THE STORY** (verses 20-25)

Lastly, we tell our children the story of the gospel. This leads to our third point.

Verse 20:

**20**When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?’

I love the beginning of this verse. “When your son asks you in time to come”. Most of the time we don’t get the responses that we want from our children. We open up the Bible day after day and the kids are still poking each other while we’re reading, or they look bored, or they just rush off and play when we’re done. It seems like a lot of work for so little return.

But verse 20 reminds us that the time is coming when their little minds aren’t so little anymore and they begin to ask questions. They begin to ask questions about why we go to church every Sunday, or why we practice baptism and the Lord’s Supper, or why we believe that marriage is only between one man and one woman, or why we don’t lie about our children’s ages at the restaurant when everyone else does it, or why we spend all this time reaching an ancient book called the Bible.

How do we respond? By just telling them, “Well God said that’s what we should do, so we should do it”? By getting frustrated that they would dare to ask questions and not just walk by faith?

No, we respond like Moses tells us to in verses 21-23. We tell them the story of God’s redemption:

**21…**then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. **22**And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. **23**And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers.’

That’s how the parents in Deuteronomy were supposed to answer their children. They were to tell their children the story of the Exodus so that their obedience to God would always be rooted in their identity as God’s redeemed people. This is how God’s people were always meant to relate to the Law. The Ten Commandments don’t begin with “You shall have no other gods before me.” They begin with “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt”. We don’t obey the Law in order to become God’s people by merit. We obey the Law because God has already made us his people by grace.

True obedience is always rooted in grace. That was true then, and it is true now. The difference between us and Israel is that, when our children ask us why we obey God’s commands, we don’t answer our children with stories about our Exodus from Egypt. We tell them stories about our Exodus from sin.

We tell them about how Jesus Christ, the Greater Moses, has led his people through a Greater Exodus. We tell them that on the cross, Jesus died as our Passover Lamb to take away our guilt and shame. We tell them that Jesus rose on the third day, and that he ascended to the right hand of the Father, and that he sent us his Spirit, in order to lead us out of the land of sin and into the true Promised Land, into the Kingdom of God, a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

When our sons and daughters ask us *why*, we tell them *who*. We tell them about Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, who came into the world to save us.

In his commentary on Deuteronomy, Christopher Wright puts it this way:

“The son asks about the law and is answered with a story— the old, old story of Yahweh and his love. The meaning of the law is to be found in the gospel.” – Christopher Wright

There is nothing more important for us to do as parents than to help our children situate their identity, purpose, and hope in the gospel. They want to know why we go to church every Sunday? Because Christ has come to save us. They want to know why we don’t pay people back when they hurt us? Because Christ has come to save us. They want to know why we open up the Bible and read it together as a family? Because Christ has come to save us.

This is our calling as parents. We are called to bring our children the gospel. Whatever our children are going through –joys or sorrows, triumphs or trials, faith or doubts – we point them again and again to Christ. We tell them the old, old story of Yahweh and his love displayed on the cross of Christ, so that we could become God’s people.

**CONCLUSION**

I’ll end with three brief points of application.

1. Feed Yourself

Moms and dads, love for the Word has to start with you. Richard Baxter said don’t starve yourself while you prepare food for others. We can only point our children to the food of God’s Word when we ourselves have feasted upon it.

As a pastor, I can tell you that if I ignored God’s Word throughout the week, I would have nothing to offer you on Sunday mornings. I could give you practical tips for living life well, or I could beat you down with harsh words, or I could inflate your ego with flattery and compliments. But I would have nothing that would nourish your souls.

We need to feast before we can feed others, and that starts with regular Bible reading and intake. If reading is hard for you, listen to sermons, not the kinds that are always angry at the culture and the state of the world, but the kinds that are seasoned with grace, that remind you of the love of God in Christ, and that motivate you to bring Christ to others.

1. Be Consistent

Earlier this year I started going for a short jog three times a week. It was hard. It’s still hard today. But I knew that I had fallen into the routine of doing it when I was visiting my parents in Niagara over the summer. It was pouring rain. But I still put on my shoes and went out for thirty minutes.

That’s what we need. Just as we develop personal routines, we need to develop family routines that involve God’s Word. It’s going to be hard, especially at the beginning. But the more you do it, the easier it becomes. So fathers, as the spiritual leaders in your home, I encourage you to make a commitment. Tell your wife and your kids that you’re going to start a regular family routine of bringing God’s Word to them. Ask them to hold you accountable, and start doing it consistently.

1. Manage Your Expectations

A lot of families don’t do family devotions because it doesn’t seem to make any difference. But the problem isn’t with the results. The problem is with our expectations. We expect that we can just have one spiritual conversation with our kids and see instant results. By the grace of God, sometimes that happens. But most of the time, it will take years of investment to see any spiritual fruit.

We need to remember that teaching God’s Word is like sowing seeds. What do seeds do when you first sow them? They just sit there. Your hard work has nothing to show for it. But if you give those seeds time and nourishment, eventually they’ll start sprouting and growing until you have an abundant harvest.

Parents, you need to lower your expectations in the short-term and increase your expectations for the long-term, because Jesus told us that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It starts off as the smallest seed, but grows up into the largest plant in the garden.

Feed yourself, be consistent, and manage your expectations. If you do, then God’s mission will advance in your kids and in the world for his glory and our joy.