

Walk By Faith (Deuteronomy 7:12-26)**Matthew Williams****5/21/2023**

In 2021, the Pew Research Center reported “One-in-five adults (20%) now describe their religion as ‘Nothing in particular,’ up from 14% who said this 10 years ago. Pew reported a similar finding earlier in 2017. “A quarter of U.S. adults (27%) now say they think of themselves as spiritual but not religious, up 8 percentage points in five years.”

What does it mean to describe your religion as “Nothing in particular”? Or to say you are “Spiritual but not religious”? It often means someone has rejected organized or institutional religion but still believes in a higher power of some kind. Am I a person of faith? Absolutely. I believe in spiritual forces. But I can’t give you a list of affirmations or denials. I can’t say this is true or that is true.

Here's the problem with trying to carve out a “Spiritual but not religious” space for yourself. Faith is only as valuable as its object. Say I believe that if I dive off this stage headfirst, I will fly.” Is that faith valuable? Not at all. In fact, it’s downright dangerous. Why? Because the object of my faith is a lie. It’s not real. I can believe with all my heart I will fly. But that doesn’t mean I will. The presence of your faith is only as valuable as the truthfulness of the object of your faith.

You say you believe in a higher power. You say you believe in a spiritual force of some kind. But that faith, that belief, is only a good thing if your conception of who that higher power is lines up with the truth. If who you conceive that spiritual force to be isn’t true, then your faith, your belief, is downright dangerous. Faith in “Nothing in particular” is no faith at all. It’s like choosing to believe in belief. The question is, “Is the object of your faith and the content of your belief, real and true?”

The Christianity of the Bible is a walk of faith. But that faith is not a choose your own adventure. It’s not belief in the concept of god, or whatever form of god strikes you as persuasive or comfortable. It’s faith in God for who he has revealed himself to be. It’s faith in the God who is actually there, who broke into human history in the person of Jesus Christ. Galatians 2:20, “The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

The message of Christianity is not, “Believe in God.” Every religion says as much. The message of Christianity is, “Believe in the Savior who loved you so much that he died on the cross to rescue you from the divine judgment your sins deserve.” That is the faith

God requires if you want to experience his covenant faithfulness in your life. The True and Living God does not reward generic faith in a generic spiritual power. You must choose to trust and obey the God who is actually there, who has made himself known to us in Jesus.

Look at verse 12. “And because you listen to *these rules* and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and steadfast love that he swore to your fathers.” What are *these rules*? It’s all Deuteronomy declares about who God is, what he’s done, and what he requires of his people as a result! Ultimately, they point forward to the person and work of Christ. If you believe *them*, not whatever you like to think is true, and demonstrate your faith by keeping and doing *them*, not whatever seems good in your own eyes, the Lord will reward you.

Here's the essential message of Deuteronomy 7:12-26. **Choose to walk by faith and you will experience God’s covenant faithfulness.** It was true for Israel back then and it’s still true today because God hasn’t changed. I’m not saying we earn God’s love through the obedience of faith. I’m saying the joy and life of relationship with him cannot be known or experienced apart from the obedience of faith. So what does genuine faith look like? It plays out in several ways.

1) FAITH ANTICIPATES GOD’S BLESSING (verses 13-15)

If the present generation chooses to “Listen to his rules and keep and do them,” to embrace the obedience of faith, what can they expect from the Lord? What can they anticipate receiving from his hand? Moses tells Israel in verse 13. “He will love you, bless you, and multiply you.” You will experience the fullness of his affectionate favor.

He's not talking about favor in the abstract. Even though your life is full of trouble, at least you will know God is for you. No. Moses describes God’s favor in the form of tangible blessings. The “Fruit of your womb,” the children in your family, will be blessed. The “Fruit of your ground,” the work of your hands, will be blessed. Your grain and wine and oil, your herds, your flocks, it will all be blessed! You won’t experience infertility (verse 14). You won’t experience any sickness (verse 15).

Where will all this abundance go down? Look at the end of verse 13. It will come to pass in God’s place, “...in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you.” Life in Canaan, life in God’s place, will be akin to life in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1-2. No more suffering. No more curse of sin. Life as it was meant to be under the smile of God’s favor.

If you know something of Israel's story you know that when she entered the Promised Land she experienced all these blessings in part. Under the reign of King David and in particular under the reign of his son, Solomon, the prosperity and abundance in Israel was the envy of the known world. But no barrenness? Not quite. No sickness? Not yet. Besides, the material prosperity she did enjoy didn't last.

After Solomon, the kingdom was divided and quickly descended into rampant idolatry, conflict, and suffering. The prophets identify the fundamental reason. Israel stopped listening to these rules and failed to "Keep and do them." She wasn't a faithful covenant partner and experienced the consequences of her sin, her rebellion against the Lord, in acutely physical ways. Occasionally she turned back to the Lord, but it never lasted. Unfaithfulness was the name of her game. Her story is our story, my friends.

But it was not Jesus' story. Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't just show up and immediately head to the cross? It's because we needed him to do more than die for us. We needed him to obey for us! We needed him to "Keep and do" all God requires as our representative. He came as the True Israel, the faithful covenant partner, to do all we inevitably fall short of doing. Through his perfect obedience, he permanently and eternally secured the affectionate favor of God toward his chosen people.

One day, King Jesus will bring all who trust and obey him home to heaven. We will finally be in God's dwelling place, the land of which Canaan was merely an echo. We will finally experience no more suffering, no more sickness. The redemption of our bodies for which we groan with all creation will be complete. We will enjoy material abundance in the presence of Jesus, our greatest treasure. That day's coming, brothers and sisters.

But is heaven the only place we can expect material blessing as the people of God? We can be so concerned about avoiding a health and wealth gospel. A false gospel that deceives people with guarantees of financial riches and physical healing on earth. Our concern is so great that we functionally deny the Father's joy in blessing his people in this life. Yes, in Christ Jesus, we have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Yet, to those who are anxious about what they will eat or drink or wear, Jesus says (Matthew 6:32-33), "Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

What do we make of all the people the apostles healed during their ministry? Why does Paul speak of "Gifts of healing" which the Spirit delights to give to members of Christ's body today? Why are we going to pray for physical healing during our prayer meeting

tonight? When preaching to the people of Lystra, what did Paul and Barnabas say of the living God? “He did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Or why did Paul tell the Corinthians that “He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”? Yes, in this world we will have trouble. And yet our suffering Savior Richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

I love how Mark 10:29-30 captures both the reality of suffering this side of heaven and the Father’s heart to lavish his people with physical blessings as we wait for glory. “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Urging Israel to walk by faith meant urging Israel to anticipate God’s blessing, material blessings included. Is that your happy expectation, friend? Or have you so spiritualized God’s love that you cannot imagine praying for, let alone receiving, a home, a car, a pay raise, a child, or an end to your back pain as expressions of his affectionate favor? Do you almost feel guilty praying or looking to the Lord for material blessings?

Does he owe us a healthy body in this life? No. Will giving more money to the work of the Lord earn a healthy body or a bigger paycheck? No. And yet we serve a generous King from whom faith anticipates blessing in abundance. The biblical alternative to the health and wealth gospel is not a God who has no concern for our material desires. He created us with material desires and delights to satisfy our desires because he’s a good Father who deeply loves his children.

Matthew 7:7–11, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Experiencing the covenant faithfulness of God requires walking by faith, a faith that anticipates God’s blessing, a faith that says in the words of Psalms 27:13. “I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!” Being blessed by God is the defining mark of the people of God. In spiritual and physical ways, both now and in glory, we are a people whom God has blessed.

2) FAITH IS CONFIDENT IN GOD'S POWER (verse 16-24)

God is not neutral in his response to the spiritual and physical forces opposed to his people's welfare. He promises to afflict "All who hate you" at the end of verse 15, all who seek your destruction. Why? Because he so identifies with his people that to hate his people is to hate him. To oppose his people is to oppose him. And whether we're talking about Israel's Egyptian taskmasters or the soul-destroying power of the world, the flesh, and the devil today, God is faithful to align himself with us against all our enemies.

What does that mean for Israel? verse 16, "You shall consume all the peoples that the LORD your God will give over to you." It means guaranteed victory in the conquest of Canaan. Has God called us to an identical battle in expanding the nation-state of Israel today? No. verse 16 is not a mandate to resettle the West Bank because the mission God has given the church today under the New Covenant is different. The battle we wage, a spiritual battle to see the kingdom of God, the redemptive rule of God, come to pass in the hearts and lives of his people. It's a fight to see men and women from every nation, starting with our children and coworkers, joyfully bow their knees to King Jesus.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ..." It's a spiritual battle on the road of obedience to Christ. And yet our enemies within and without are just as real and the promise of victory just as sure. As the Lord urged Israel to be confident in his power, so he urges us today. The work is different, but the underlying principle is the same.

Verse 17 highlights the timeless nature of our need. "These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?" How indeed! Have you ever looked at your broken marriage and said in your heart, "How can we ever be reconciled?" Have you ever looked at the children in your home and said, "How can I ever lead them to fear the Lord?" Have you ever looked at the two weeks of work a client demands you accomplish in two days and said, "How can I ever get all of this done?" Have you ever contemplated a difficult conversation you know you need to have with a friend and said, "How can I ever say the right words?" Have you sensed the domineering power of a besetting sin in your life and said, "How can I ever put that impulse to death?"

You know God has set the work before you. But it feels impossible. So you're anxious. You're not sleeping. Your blood pressure is up. You're afraid. What God is asking of you

requires more than you have within yourself and you know it. What's the answer? An abiding faith that rests in the power of God.

Who's missing from the questions in verse 17? "*These nations* are greater than *I*. How can *I* dispossess them?" God is missing. Were the nations greater? Yes. Could Israel dispossess them? Absolutely not. So why not be afraid? Because the nations and Israel are not the only characters on the stage. There is a Living God, a faithful God, a mighty God, seated in heaven, reigning over the universe, who acts for those who wait for him. Yes, you see the nations. Yes, you see yourself. But don't stop there, Israel. Don't stop there, KingsWay. Remember the Lord! Remember the faithfulness of your God!

Verse 18, "You shall not be afraid of them but you shall remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, by which the LORD your God brought you out."

Christian, do not fear the nations. Fear the Lord. Remember the gospel. Remember the greater exodus from sin and death Jesus won for you at the cross. Remember the triumph of his grace as he stands victorious before an empty tomb. Remember all the Lord has done in your life to bring you safely thus far. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Don't focus on how you've failed in the past or could fail in the future. Meditate on the redeeming power of God!

Why does Moses pile up phrases like great trials, signs, wonders, a mighty hand and an outstretched arm? Because there's so much to remember! The same is true for us today in Jesus. Christian, in Jesus, God chose you. He called you. He regenerated you. He adopted you. He justified you. He sanctified you. And he has empowered you. Right now, at this very moment, he is working all things together for your good. You do not walk through life as a miserable underdog, barely hanging on. Romans 8:37, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

So in the words of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 35:3–4), "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.'" Remember the gospel, Christian. What God has done before, he will do again. He doesn't grow old. He doesn't take breaks. He doesn't lose his edge. Your God is a God who saves. Verse 19, "So will the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid." His saving acts in the past shape our confidence for the present and the future, which is why meditating on God's Word is so important. It fuels our faith!

The victory he has promised us in Christ is just as comprehensive as the victory he promised Israel. So do not be “In dread of them,” verse 21, do not look at the challenge set before you and tremble in fear. Why not? “For the LORD your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God.” Christian, how much more is God with you! He’s not in a tent down the street like he was in the tabernacle in Israel. Through the Holy Spirit, he dwells within you! You are never, ever alone. The Lord says to you what he said to Moses, Joshua, and Gideon, though in an immeasurably greater way – “I am with you.”

Does the timetable of his deliverance, his provision, always make sense to us? No. But it’s not because he’s missing in action. It’s because he knows what is best. He’s not just powerful and present. He’s wise. Verse 22, “The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little. You may not make an end of them at once, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you.”

Are the forces arrayed against you, both without and within, frightening? Fear not. The nations are greater than you. But our God is greater still. If you’re walking by faith, if your confidence for deliverance from all your enemies – sin and death included – rests in Jesus, this you know. Of this you can be certain. In Christ, verse 24, “No one shall be able to stand against you.” Rest in his power. Rest in his presence. Rest in his wisdom.

Did you notice how Moses describes the Lord in verse 16 and in verse 23 as “Giving” the nations over to Israel? What kind of God does that? A God who has absolute control, complete mastery, total sovereignty. Brothers and sisters, such is the Lord’s relationship to every one of your enemies, to all who oppose the good work he is doing in you and through you. He’s not just with you and against them. He’s over them. And because God will “Give” them to Israel (verse 24), Israel will “Make” their name perish. Their victory will be the direct result of his victory. Indeed, his victory will enable their victory.

Every family member that mocks your faith. Every temptation that would lure you away from loving the Lord. Every disgruntled employee that could sabotage your company, every child that seems hellbent on making you snap. Every demonic power whispering, “Go ahead, take your life”. They walk onto the field of battle as a defeated foe subject to the authority and power of Christ Jesus.

When the Jews leaders sought to kill the apostles in Acts 5, one of their number, Gamaliel, stood up and declared (Acts 5:35-39): “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men...For if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but

if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them.” If you are in Christ, his purpose to glorify his name through your life will succeed.

Will he restore your marriage? Will he save your child? Will he heal your back? I don't know. But we do know this. Our God is supreme in power, an ever-present help in trouble, and perfectly wise. That's the confidence we have in every good work the Lord calls us to do. That's why we trust him and refuse to stop trusting him, for in him our final victory is assured. Genuine faith is confident in God's power.

3) FAITH UPHOLDS GOD'S JUDGEMENTS (verse 25-26)

The assurance in verse 16-24 that God will surely triumph over their enemies is sandwiched between two identical warnings. We skipped over the first one earlier in verse 16. “You shall consume all the peoples that the LORD your God will give over to you. Your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.” Moses repeats the same basic message in verse 25. “The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it...”

Israel's mission was an expression of God's righteous judgment against Canaanite idolatry. Her job was to destroy them completely, false gods included. But what would she be tempted to do? The same thing we would be tempted to do. Do we really need to wipe them out? Isn't conquering them enough? Can't we go easy on them just a bit and still achieve the same goal? Do we really have to burn their gods? Do you have any idea how much silver and gold are in them? We could melt it off and put it to good use! God wouldn't want all that precious metal to go to waste, would he?

What's the temptation in a nutshell? To substitute our judgments for God's. To make compromises like, “I know that nation or those idols will seek to lead me away from the Lord, but I'm sure I can handle it. I'll be careful. I know God says it's an abomination, a grievous affront to his glory, but I like to think of more as a risk I can mitigate.

I know “House of the Dragon” has a lot of graphic sex, but trust me, I have the self-control to not lust after any of those women. I know my closest friends have little to no interest in the Lord, but I think I can resist their influence. I know that job will require 80 hours a week and my spouse is concerned I already don't get enough time with the kids or spend consistent time in God's Word. But I'm sure I can make it work. I know my girlfriend isn't a Christian, but I think I can give my heart to her and still love the Lord.

You say it's wrong and I should run the other way. I think of it more as a challenge I can navigate without too much trouble.

Why did God command Israel to "Consume" the Canaanites and burn their gods? Because both actions upheld the authority of his righteous judgment. It was a critical way Israel privileged God's verdict over her own evaluation. It was a necessary expression of humility.

When the Lord warns her in verse 25, "You shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it," what's he saying? That you can't play with fire and not be burned. You can't flirt with sin and remain unaffected. Either you wage war against your sinful desires or they will kill you. In Colossians 3:5, Paul doesn't say, "Try to not indulge too much in what is earthly." He says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you."

To walk by faith means you refuse to toy with, make peace, or celebrate things or sights or actions God has said are evil. What the Lord is against, we must be against. What God has purposed to destroy we must put to death. The posture of God's heart toward evil must be our posture toward evil. Verse 26, "You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction."

Do not content yourself with saying, "I sure wish I could do that, but I won't, because I know it's wrong." That little part of your heart that wishes you could sin will kill you, friend. Genuine faith says more than, "Ok, I'll try not to cross the line." No. It says, "Lord, what you hate, I hate. What you abhor, I abhor. The sin and wickedness you have triumphed over at the cross I will not attempt to resurrect from the grave. I will not feed the monster you defeated. I will put to death by your power the sin you have defeated and purposed to destroy. Your attitude toward sin will be my attitude toward sin." Genuine faith upholds the judgments of God.

CONCLUSION

The True and Living God, the God with whom we have to do, does not reward generic faith in a generic spiritual power. You must trust and obey the God who is actually there. **Choose to walk by faith and you will experience God's covenant faithfulness.**

What does genuine faith look like? It's a heart that turns away from trusting your ability to save yourself and toward trusting Jesus to save you. Looking to him to give you life, to him to give you joy, to him to cleanse your heart, remove your shame, forgive your sin, and make you right with God.

That kind of faith, genuine faith, Christ-centered faith, anticipates God’s blessing, is confident in God’s power, and upholds God’s judgments. That’s what biblical faith looks like in action. May the Lord plant and increase that kind of faith in our souls for his glory.