



Deuteronomy 10:12-22

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EXEGETICAL NOTES

Telling the Story

The text reminds the people of God (Israel, v. 12) of their core identity before “the Lord your God,” the Lord of heaven and earth (v. 14), who loved their fathers and chose them as a people “above all peoples” (v. 15), and made them “as numerous as the stars of heaven (v. 22; see God’s promise to father Abraham in Gen. 15:5). After establishing the nature of the relationship between the Lord God and His people by drawing attention to God’s gratuitous love for a “stubborn” people (Deut. 10:16), the writer proceeds to speak about the proper response that follows from being the chosen “offspring” of the fathers (v. 15) whom God led to Egypt (v. 22; see Gen. 46:27 for a reference to the “seventy” who came into Egypt from the house of father Jacob) and out of Egypt through the Red Sea (Deut. 10:21, “these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen”).

The appropriate response to God’s love and election of His people is to love, fear, and hold fast to Him (vv. 12, 20). This is the language of faith and trust in the Lord God who saved His people out of Egypt (v. 21), and deals with the first table of the Law which calls God’s people to love Him “with all your heart and with all your soul” (v. 12). Those who serve the Lord swear by (or confess) His name, praise Him, and keep His commandments (vv. 12, 20-21), which also include the second table of the Law summed up in love of neighbor. God’s people reflect His heart and serve as instruments of His care



and compassion for vulnerable neighbors such as “the fatherless and the widow” and the “sojourner” (v. 18). Since God “loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing” (v. 18), His people are called to “love the sojourner” (v. 19). Sojourners receive special attention in the text. God’s heart moved Him to love and save a vulnerable, sojourning Israel (vv. 15, 21). By remembering the Exodus experience of her own fathers and mothers, Israel is called to mirror the heart of God by loving the sojourners in her midst (“for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt,” v. 19).

Admittedly, the story of Israel shows many instances of her lack of trust in God, and thus her need for repentance. The writer recalls the rite of circumcision, which served as a sign of God’s gracious covenant with His people, as a means to call His stubborn people to “circumcise” their hearts (v. 10; the Lord is the one who circumcises their hearts in Deut. 10:16). Since God “is not partial and takes no bribe” (Deut. 10:17), neither should

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His people when they deal with others—especially, with vulnerable neighbors who can easily be taken advantage of. Nor should they commit injustice of any kind against them, since their own Lord and God “executes justice” on behalf of orphans and widows (v. 18). The call to repentance, to the circumcision of the heart, assumes Israel’s careless attitude towards sojourners in her midst, and therefore, underscores her need to die to self in order to make room in her heart for these neighbors.

APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

A Circumcision of the Heart

The text shows that God’s heart goes out to neighbors, such as sojourners, who, due to their vulnerability, require the priority of His people’s concern and love. Nevertheless, God’s people have not always mirrored God’s heart in their dealings with sojourners. This was true then, and it is unfortunately still true in our own times. Today, we often hear God’s people speak ill of sojourners, such as refugees from Syria or asylum seekers from Central America, even though these neighbors have overwhelmingly experienced great trauma, tragedy, and all kinds of hardship in their lives.

In our text, God does not debate the merits of our arguments for or against immigration, but rather calls His people to a more basic commitment regardless of our personal political ideas or positions on immigration law and reform today. That fundamental commitment is simple: To make room in one’s heart for the sojourners.

The text cannot be clearer on this non-negotiable point: God “loves the sojourner” (v. 18); therefore, “love the sojourner” (v. 19).

The contemporary prophet has an opportunity to call God’s people to repentance today—a circumcision of the heart (v. 16)—for their stubbornness, partiality, and injustice, for their failure to love sojourners near and far. Have we prayed for them, spoken on their behalf, extended the hand of mercy to them, reached out to them with the Gospel, or assisted others to carry out these acts of compassion and justice? We come to the mirror of God’s Law, see our transgressions, and ask the Lord to circumcise our hearts and make us once again His people.

Remember Who You Are

The proclaimer today also has a marvelous opportunity to remind God’s people of their own identity in Christ, that is, an identity anchored in faith and trust in “your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen” (v. 21). We may not have seen with our eyes the “great and terrifying” acts of God at the Exodus, or crossed the waters of the Red Sea back then. But we have seen and bathed in God’s salvation in Christ in these last days. Through our baptism into Christ, God has made us an Exodus people and brought us safely through the waters onto safe ground. As Martin Luther put it in the Flood Prayer of his Baptismal Booklet: “Almighty and eternal God...who drowned Pharaoh with his army in the Red Sea and led Your people Israel

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through the same sea on dry ground, thereby prefiguring this bath of your Holy Baptism...we ask for the sake of this very same boundless mercy of yours that you would look graciously upon N. [i.e., name of child] and bless [him or her] with true faith..."

It is true that, at some point, Israel forgot her own historic identity as a sojourning people and this led to a lack of concern for sojourners in need. So God reminds Israel to love the sojourner "for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (v. 19). Today, many Christians also forget that the United States is, historically speaking, a nation of immigrants, and such historical amnesia has at times led to a cold or, at best, lukewarm attitude towards new immigrants. Nevertheless, whether a Christian has an immediate or earlier relative who was a sojourner (say, a migrant or refugee) or not, or whether that history moves him or her to compassion for immigrants today, the text still directs all God's people to an even deeper and more fundamental identity in Christ. That core identity amounts to this basic, non-negotiable point: On this earth, we too are Israel, that is, a sojourning people, who have seen and bathed in God's gracious salvation, and whose "citizenship is in heaven" (see Philippians 3:20; "citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" in

Eph. 2:19). Therefore, regardless of one's understanding of his or her national identity as a citizen of the earthly city, the biblical text proclaims our baptismal identity as an Exodus people and members of God's heavenly city.

Mirroring Yahweh's Love for Sojourners Like Us

What then follows from such identity as an Exodus people? The preacher now can invite the hearers to embody their love for the sojourner. The text suggests two interrelated forms of love towards the sojourner, namely, 1) executing justice by dealing fairly with vulnerable neighbors and taking care of their everyday temporal needs in the earthly city, and 2) proclaiming God's gracious justification freely by inviting sojourning neighbors to share in God's gifts of salvation in the heavenly city. Otherwise stated, acts of justice for the neighbor go hand in hand with acts of justification on behalf of our neighbors. God's will extends to both realms of activity, where sojourners are served by God's people both with "food and clothing" (v.18) and the good news that "God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven" (v. 22). In its application, the text has great moral/ethical and missional potential.

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SERMON OUTLINE

Applications for Today in Sermon Outline Format

I. Call to Repentance: A Circumcision of the Heart

- a. God's people have not always mirrored God's heart towards sojourners. The same is true today (e.g., Syrian refugees, Central American asylum seekers).
- b. God's command to love the sojourner serves as a fundamental word and value that His people must heed and act upon regardless of their positions on immigration law and reform.
- c. But we have been stubborn in fulfilling God's command. (The preacher may ask hearers if they have prayed for, advocated for, reached out to, or assisted in efforts to care for refugees.)
- d. Therefore, we need a circumcision of the heart. We need to be renewed into God's gracious covenant with us, a hard-hearted people.

II. Proclamation of Identity in Christ: Remember Who You Are

- a. God showed His mercy to a sojourning people and saved them through the Exodus. The same is true today: God makes us an Exodus people through Baptism into Christ. (The preacher may refer to Luther's Flood Prayer as a reminder of the hearers' core identity.)

- b. As time went by, Israel forgot her immigrant identity as a sojourning nation and all the hardships from which God delivered their ancestors in the Exodus. Historical amnesia affects God's people today too, especially when they forget about the great struggles that their immigrant ancestors went through as newcomers to the U.S. This often leads to a lack of compassion towards or emotional detachment from neighbors with similar experiences today.
- c. Regardless of whether one can claim or identify with the U.S. as an immigrant nation, the more profound reality is that, as an Exodus people, the church is at heart a sojourning people called by a gracious God and thus with citizenship in a heavenly city.

III. Invitation to Service:

Mirroring Yahweh's Love for Sojourners Like Us

- a. The church's identity as a sojourning people in the earthly city, with a citizenship in heaven, calls her to mirror Yahweh's love for sojourners in their midst.
- b. Yahweh's love for sojourners is embodied through acts of justice (dealing with life with others in the earthly city) and justification (dealing with life in the heavenly city through faith in Christ) on their behalf. (The preacher can suggest ways to get involved in caring for refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants in holistic ways.)