

"Simplicity and Accessibility"

Text: Deuteronomy 30:9-14

May the love shown to you in Christ Jesus our Lord fill you with hope and confidence, day by day, until that same Lord Jesus returns in power and glory on the Last Day. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, you've all heard about the old guy trying to give directions to the tourist city slicker - "Ya just go straight down this road, turn left where the old school-house used to be...no, no, you cain't go thataway...go on down to that field that Clyde Watkins just sold...no, no, that won't work" and so on until he finally throws up his hands and says, "Ya cain't git there from here." The point this morning is that we live in an age where more and more we come to expect that we can get there from here. No matter what and no matter where, we have come to expect that we are entitled to go, entitled to attend, entitled to enjoy, entitled to have. People in foreign countries tell us that Americans routinely consider themselves to be exceptions to every rule. The signs say, "No Trespassing" and "Do Not Touch" and "Please Don't..." and yet Americans assume that the signs are meant for someone else. "It wouldn't do to have everybody touching, but it won't matter if I do." "They can't have everybody going into this special area, but it won't hurt if just I go." It's all about accessibility. Jet travel and computers a surplus of money and our own prideful arrogance are all creating the impression that nothing is beyond us. Nothing - or at least almost nothing - is or should be inaccessible for us.

In the field of religion, our belief in accessibility is sometimes good, and sometimes bad. It's bad when we imagine that we naturally deserve accessibility to God, or that we can earn that privilege. It is bad when we take our Christian son-ship lightly; that is, when it comes to mean very little to us that we can now daily, through Christ, come fearlessly into the presence of our Heavenly Father and speak to him about whatever is on our hearts or minds. It is bad when we take for granted (or take lightly) the terrible price that had to be paid to win that accessibility we now enjoy with God the Father.

It is good, on the other hand, to know that the teachings of God's Word - the basic doctrines of Christianity - are not inaccessible to us (they are not above and beyond us.) They are in fact highly *accessible*. We can know them and we can possess them. God does not present his salvation plan to us in such a way that only a rare and chosen few could ever understand or possess it, let alone benefit from it.

This is the message of our text for today, the message that while God's Law makes demands that we could never hope to fulfill, in connection with Jesus Christ and the New Covenant he has *not* demanded of us that which is unattainable to sinful human beings. He has, on the contrary, offered the gift of

salvation equally and simply to each one of us. Our text is found in the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy, the 13th Chapter:

ESV **Deuteronomy 30:9-14** *The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, ¹⁰ when you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹¹ ¶ "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹⁴ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.*

Remember that what you have just read are not the words of men but the Word of God. These words are therefore absolutely worthy of careful study and meditation. God's Word itself assures you that you are blessed each time you hear that Word of God and treasure it. So we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Doctors have long liked to tell us that the only thing that we should put into our ears is our elbow. They are telling us, obviously, that since we cannot put our elbow into our ears, we ought to put *nothing* into our ears. While this is just a cute way to make a point, what if God *had* said that each of us had to do something similarly difficult before we could go to heaven. Well, he did... and he didn't.

God *did* tell us that if we were the ones earning our own entrance into heaven, we could do so only by keeping absolutely every commandment perfectly, from birth to death. Hard to imagine anything more difficult, especially for those born sinful. The good news is that that's not God's plan for our salvation. God's plan is that his Son provides every bit of goodness necessary to pay our sin debt.

But to which is our text referring? Is it a reference to the covenant God made with the Children of Israel – the 2-sided agreement between God and his Old Testament people? Is it a reference to the New Covenant – the one-sided covenant whereby God, in Christ, supplies all that is needed and man supplies nothing? Of is it a reference to the salvation plan whereby man must keep the law to get to heaven?

It's not easy to tell, is it? Moses seems to be telling the Jews that if they keep the commandments they will earn God's favor. We then logically assume that if they earn God's favor, they will also earn their place in God's heaven – all by keeping his commandments.

Understand first of all that what God was saying here to the Jews long before the birth of Christ was not that they could earn *heaven* by their works. He was telling them how they could survive and prosper as a nation on earth. So also God carefully outlined exactly what he expected of the Jews, and what he would do if they obeyed. His point was that what he expected of them was neither hidden nor impossible. They were to keep him as their one true God, struggle against sin, and God would in turn bless them as a nation as long as they lived.

Note that this said nothing about earning heaven, which was something different altogether. There, what God expected of man was not *unclear*, but it *was* impossible. To earn heaven, God demanded absolute perfection – every second of every living moment. He had every right to expect man to keep his laws; we just didn't do it.

But are we justified in applying the words of our text to the New Covenant? Obviously these words would hold nothing but gloom and terror if God were here telling us that we had to be perfect to get to heaven. Is that then what our text is really talking about, given the fact that these words were spoken about 15 Centuries before the birth of Jesus? Wouldn't it be great to be able to ask, say, one of the Apostles? Wouldn't it be an incredible blessing to ask, for example, the Apostle Paul to comment on these verses?

We can. Because he already did. Romans 10:5-10: ***For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ or "'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."***

Paul, writing here by divine inspiration, quotes our text and records the Holy Spirit's own explanation of it. Man could not survive the "law plan" that he gave through Moses, so God himself provided what man could not. Our God is here telling us that his salvation plan is both simple and accessible.

Would God have been justified in demanding more from us than simple faith in what *Jesus* has done? Could he have demanded some excruciatingly

painful exercise, or some near physical impossibility? Could he have demanded some financially crippling sacrifice or self-mutilation or some such thing? Of course. He had every right to demand whatever he wanted of us. God is God. He can do just as he pleases. *We* are the ones who had rebelled. *We* are the ones who had turned our backs on him and by human standards should at the very least have been made to perform some difficult and painful acts of penance – if we were to be saved at all.

Yet what could we have offered? What could we present to a holy and just God to pay for even one of our sins against him? God is perfect. God is holy. Imperfect and unholy man could do or say or think *nothing* that could erase our own unrighteousness. Our sinful minds cannot even comprehend perfection, let alone know how to satisfy a perfect God. So then God could have demanded anything, but nothing we could give or do could ever have amounted to a satisfactory sin-payment in the eyes of Almighty God.

Therefore God established a covenant with sinful mankind that (using the words of our text) ***"is not too hard for (us) or beyond (our) reach."*** God has made himself accessible to sinful mankind. Erase from your mind the arrogant American thoughts that tell you that you naturally deserve and are entitled to God's heaven. Instead see yourself as you truly are, completely unworthy - a castoff without any rights or privileges. The rebellious *created ones* could never hope to please *their Creator*. And since the sinful mortal could never comprehend the perfect immortal God, we too had to cry out in the words of the Psalmist: ***"Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth!"*** Man could not rise to God's level, so only God could save man. This God did in the simplest, most beautiful fashion. To bridge the gap between God and man, God became man.

God in his Word tells us in Galatians 4:4-5, ***"But when the fullness of time had come,*** (that is, when he determined that the time was just right) ***God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."*** We were sinful and had no hope, no chance of pulling off the spiritual equivalent of putting our elbows into our ears. This is exactly what Paul said in Romans 8:3: ***"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*** Paul is here telling us that the demands of God's Law carried no ability to provide the perfection that was demanded. We needed a Savior, and God himself has provided us with just that. We now have a simple and sure path back to him through faith in Jesus Christ. The torment of eternal hell that certainly awaited each of us no longer holds

any terror for us. ***"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (Romans 5:1)

Yet the depths of man's depravity is astounding. The very simplicity of God's New Covenant, the very accessibility of God himself and the lack of any sacrifice necessary on the part of man are the very things that make God's plan unbelievable and unacceptable to sinful mankind. Like Naaman, who did not believe the simple plan laid out by Elisha for the cure of his leprosy, so sinful mankind today imagines that there must be more. Natural man imagines that salvation could not just be *given* to us, it must be earned.

Have you ever gone out to eat with a group of people and in a weak but magnanimous moment offered to pick up the tab - only to glance at the size of the bill and wish that you hadn't made the offer? So it will one day be with unbelieving mankind. In the clearest of terms, Jesus (the only one who could afford to do so) has picked up the tab for our sins. He didn't even ask; he just did it. Galatians 3:13: ***"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us."*** By his perfect life and innocent death he paid all that was owed to God the Father for every sin ever committed. Suffice it to say, it was big bill. Mankind, thinking himself grand and benevolent, magnanimously still offers to pay his fair share. God told him that, on the contrary, if he really wanted to pay part, he must pay all. Arrogant man agreed. *"How much can it cost?"* he asked himself. Unfortunately man only gets his first glimpse of the bill on Judgment Day, once it is too late. The cost for each individual sin is eternal death in hell, and the list of man's sins is endless.

Why does mankind refuse what is so good and simple? Why do human beings naturally despise *God's* simple and accessible plan and look for a more demanding and impossible path? That's Satan himself working in and through our own sinful natures. Satan dearly wants us to rebel against God and to reject his plan for our salvation because he knows that the moment we do, we become his.

Learn from this. Learn to trust not in your own good sense or your own sound judgment, for they will inevitably lead you to make the same foolish choices the Children of Israel made. Trust God and his plan for your salvation. Be filled with the Holy Spirit and rely on him to be your truth and your light. Do not reject the simplicity of God's plan for salvation, and do not scorn your present ability and privilege to talk to God at any moment of any day. We have a loving and highly accessible God – yet a God who is infinitely wise and immeasurably merciful and loving. This same God has revealed the one path to heaven in the simplest of terms. Your sins are forgiven because of what Jesus did. Trust in him, and you will be saved. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Galatians 1:1-10** Paul, an apostle--not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead--² and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:³ ¶ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,⁵ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.⁶ ¶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.¹⁰ ¶ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

^{ESV} **Luke 7:1-10** After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.² Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.³ When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him,⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue."⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof."⁷ Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.⁸ For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."⁹ When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."¹⁰ And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

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Michael Roehl, Pastor

Today's Organist: Suzannah Miller

The Second Sunday after Pentecost – May 29, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 30 (Verses 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Oh That I Had a Thousand Voices"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 5.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Epistle Lesson: (Galatians 1:1-10) Paul wastes no time in letting the Galatian Congregation know just what God the Holy Spirit thinks of their alterations of the gospel. In the opening verses of his Letter to them he reminds them that, far from improving on it, changing the gospel even a little bit actually destroys it completely. Man does this whenever he adds to or takes away from God's Word. We do not add to God's salvation plan for our souls by our actions. All that we need was supplied for us by Jesus' perfect life and innocent death.

The Gospel Lesson: (Luke 7:1-10) Only twice do we read in the Bible that Jesus was amazed by something. Once it was at the stubborn lack of faith on the part of some unbelievers. The other time it was at the greatness of the faith he found in the Centurion, the event recorded in our Gospel Lesson this morning. Pray for such a faith that takes Jesus at His Word – without question, hesitation, or reservation.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 428 (Red Hymnal)

"I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus"

The Sermon - Text: Deuteronomy 30:9-14 (Printed on the back page)

"Simplicity and Accessibility"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 245 (Red Hymnal)

"God Loved the World So that He Gave"

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Closing Hymn – 52 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty Father Bless the Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with congregations throughout the United States, as well as mission affiliates scattered around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance - Sunday (42) Average (48)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
Tuesday	-10:00 a.m.	– Start of WCDC in Jamestown
Thursday	-12:00 p.m.	– Close of WCDC
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time

CLC News – The West-Central Delegate Conference is scheduled to meet on Tuesday through Thursday noon of this week in Jamestown. Teacher Jeff Karnitz is considering the call to Gethsemane of Spokane, WA. Pastor Matthew Hanel has returned the call to Faith of Markesan, WI. Seminary graduate Joseph Naumann is considering the calls to Mt Zion of Detroit and Immanuel of Mankato.

Ruth Meiers Food Drive – Our food drive for the Ruth Meiers House concludes June 1. For more information, please see Eileen McEnroe, or refer to the card in your mailbox.

West Central Delegate Conference – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend the West Central Delegate Conference this week in Jamestown. Please let the Pastor know if you would be willing and able to serve as a delegate on any or all of the days of the conference.

Church Council Notes – Four Council members, plus the Pastor, met on May 22. Minutes are available upon request.

Organ Volume – We continue to fine tune our new organ to suit our needs. We are currently trying to get the volume adjusted. If you find the organ is too loud, it might help to sit farther forward, even though that is very un-Lutheran. Also please don't hesitate to share your thoughts with the Pastor or with a Council member. We will work at it until we get it just right.