

Pentecost 15
September 6, 2015
Deuteronomy 4:1,2, 6-8
What Other Nation is So Great?
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Fellow-Redeemed in Christ,

It must have been bittersweet for Moses. Standing before the people God had chosen him to lead, the LORD's faithful servant gave commands for a glorious day he would not see. Moses would die there in the Plains of Moab east of the Jordan. The LORD would bury Moses in a location known only to him. The nation would cross the Jordan River and at last take possession of Canaan without him.

But before he died, Moses had the joy and privilege of repeating all the "decrees and laws" the LORD had given him to pass along. Moses' audience was a new generation. Only Joshua and Caleb remained from the adults whom the LORD had saved from Egypt and given the Law on Mt. Sinai. These "decrees and laws," which included every word from God, characterized God's great nation. It separated them from the heathen around them.

This new generation had seen God's judgment against those who had complained against the LORD and against Moses. At the same time, they had witnessed God's endless patience that is his forgiveness. Now, heeding their LORD's Word, they would take possession of the land west of the Jordan as God had promised their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Moses recognition of these blessings, and his gratitude to the LORD led Moses to ask the question of our theme: **What Other Nation is So Great?** It is characterized by the great decrees and laws the Lord gives in his Word. Its people show wisdom and understanding among its neighbors.

Israel's greatness did not lie in the people's goodness. Moses reminded these children of their fathers' sins against the LORD and the consequences. We read in Numbers 25 that at Beth Peor, near where they were, many men "began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to sacrifice to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods."

The LORD struck dead 24,000 Baal worshippers. The LORD does not take rebellion against his glory lightly. Moses also reminded his hearers, "But all of you who held fast to the LORD your God are still alive today." Now Moses would re-teach them God's Word as they took possession of the land and lived there. They were to follow that Word closely, not add to or subtract from it, as they held fast to their LORD in saving faith in him as their only God.

What other nation is so great as that nation which follows in love the LORD's decrees and laws? There is no visible nation like that on earth. Israel was a visible nation only in so far as the believers followed the LORD's commands. Remember, that at that time the nation was the visible expression of the church's presence. The LORD had revealed only to Israel his commands and his promise of the Savior.

Today the great nation Moses references would be the visible church. This church possesses God's Word with all of the Law and the Gospel. Within this church are all believers in Jesus Christ who strive in the Spirit to follow God's will. They alone possess the kingdom of God now and the kingdom of glory in the Promised Land of heaven.

What characterizes the church is the Word of God. The church with the Word of God is not to add any human decisions, rules, and traditions to it. The church that has the Word of God is not to subtract anything, literally, cut off anything, from it.

Sadly we see that now as then, this is not the case. Many in the church add human laws and traditions to God's Word. Many try to remove the things that do not agree with human reason or things people do not want to practice so they can sin openly. Moses words to Israel are a fitting and stark reminder to us to continue to preach and teach God's Word in its truth and purity.

The visible Christian Church today is like the visible nation of Israel in Moses' day. It is not merely the possession of God's Word that make the church great. God's Word allows its people to show wisdom and understanding among its neighbors

Moses commanded the people, "Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

The heathen nations surrounding Israel needed to see the greatness of the LORD over their idols in God's Law in all its aspects-moral, ceremonial and civil. They would see the LORD's greatness as his people showed their wisdom and understanding in following those laws. The idolaters were to see the greatness of the LORD over their idols in the promise of a Savior other than themselves. The idolaters would see the greatness of the LORD in the greatness in the people's wisdom and understanding to believe those promises and live in them.

God's Word is righteous because it comes from the true God. Its laws benefit us with physical rest, a good marriage and happy family, a sound and healthy body, safe property, a good reputation, and contentment with the way things are in life. The Word with its good news of God's Son who sacrificed himself in our place so that God has lifted from us the burden of sin and guilt benefits us with forgiveness for all our sins and eternal life in heaven.

You likely have experienced as have I that when we obey God's Ten Commandments joyfully and honestly in faith, it has an effect on people. Some see the greatness of God in our lives and resent it. Others see the greatness of God in our lives and inquire more about it. In that case, God has opened the door for us to show Jesus' holy life and innocent death, Jesus' cross and empty tomb.

What other nation is so great? A great nation is the kingdom of God that is in our hearts. A great nation is the visible church as it remains true to the Word of God and does not add to it or subtract from it. No people who worship false gods has those gods as close to them as the LORD God is close to us. May our daily prayer be "Lord, compelled by the love Christ has had for me, lead me faithfully to hear your Word and obey it. May my faith and obedience to you manifest to others the greatness of your love for me, and for them." Amen. <SDG>