

## TIME TO TEACH! TIME TO LEARN!

Texts: Deut. 6:1-9; Col. 2:1-5

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### Introduction

Some stories you just hear about. Others you become a part of. One writer tells of a routine Sunday school class when suddenly the door flew open and a man in burlap robes with a gray beard thundered in and said, "I am Moses come down from the mountain with the tablets of the ten commandments!" "But I come in to find that while I have been meeting with God, you've been worshipping the golden calf. Everything is ruined!"

And with that he slammed the cardboard tablets down on the table with a crack that made them jump in their chairs. That crack was important. Looking back the writer says, "I didn't know much about Moses and the giving of the Law. But ever after that day I knew it mattered."

Do you see what happened? No longer was he sitting in class *about* Moses and the Ten Commandments. The teacher *was* Moses and they *were* rebellious Israel. The story had gotten inside of the teacher, it had gotten inside of them...and it was something they needed to do something about.

**1. It's hard to be a Christian teacher until we realize that we are part of a story that matters – one than changes lives. *Before we can begin to teach others what it means to love God, we've got to get it into ourselves that we are loved by him in a wonderful, dangerous sort of way.***

Before we come to our text - the teaching of Moses that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength - there is this stunning example of how God loves us.

*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Deut. 5:6)* Before the Ten Commandments are uttered, before the command to love God is given, there is this declaration of just what God did for us.

I'm talking to teachers today. Teachers in our church school classrooms and small group meetings. Teachers coaching soccer teams and sitting in car pool lines. Teachers talking over the day around their family dinner tables. And that means I'm talking to many (maybe most) of us.

The first requirement to be a Christian teacher is the deep seated conviction that you are part of a story that matters. The same God who rescued Israel from Egypt has rescued you for himself in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Do you remember your favorite teachers? Mine were passionate people. They cared deeply about the subject. I hated calculus. But Mr. Rhymer loved Calculus. He came to the blackboard with the intensity of a football coach diagramming a shotgun offense. Bits of chalk (yes we used chalk then) flew as Mr. Rhymer assaulted the second and third derivatives. When he finished a problem you wanted to stand up and cheer. And I learned to like Calculus a little bit...because Mr. Rhymer loved it a lot.

The heart of Christian teaching is the deep seated awareness that you have been loved by God and caught up in his promises. Your passion will awaken our passion. The key to being a Christian teacher is not mastering your subject; it's the undeniable reality that you have been mastered by it.

Behind our teaching there has to be a heartfelt conviction that nothing matters more than being loved by God.

**2. So our teaching begins with the deep assurance that we are a part of God's beloved people. *But its goal is to help others learn how respond to so great a love.***

That was Moses' teaching. People who have been powerfully loved by God must love him in return – with all their heart, soul, and strength. And we need to be clear that Moses was asking for far more than a sense of overwhelming sentimentality at the mention of God's name.

The terms heart, soul, and strength describe the character of love. In Hebrew the *heart* referred to the intellect, will, and intentions. A person thinks with their heart, and out of that heart they act.

*Soul* is a little different than we might think. It refers to the whole inner person – emotions, desires, and personal characteristics. To love with the soul is to love with all that is in me.

And “*strength*” takes it to a different level. Usually the word means something like “very much”. The call is to love the Lord your God with total commitment, with your total self, to total excess.

Now maybe you are wondering what I wonder: how do you teach that? Telling people facts about God, or what God expects of them, won't necessarily produce the character of love we have mentioned.

In our Colossians text the Apostle Paul wanted to teach his church about *the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. But he began by seeking something else first. He wanted each of them to be “encouraged in heart” and “united in love”. He wanted them unified and full of concern for each other. Then they could really “know” Christ as he is meant to be known.

Whether our classroom is in this building or sitting around our living room, what kind of environment do we create in which to teach Christ? Do we only talk about God, or do people talk to each other about God? Do people feel cared for and encouraged in our classroom? Do we have the sense that we're talking about the God who is “in here with us” or “out there somewhere”?

We need to bear witness in our teaching that God isn't a subject to be learned; he's a person to be known, an encounter to be had, and a way of life to be lived.

**3. Moses had a way of doing that kind of teaching. He did it by teaching his people the commandments of God. *But he made it clear that the commandments have to be kept from the inside out.***

*These commandments I give you today are to be upon your hearts.* Moses didn't mean just the big 10 but all he would teach the people about how to live faithfully in the land that God was giving them. But the commandments have to find a place in the heart, in the thinking-willing-acting center of your being.

That's what the longest Psalm in Scripture, Psalm 119 is all about: bringing the words and ways of God into our hearts, in to the soulful center of our attention. *I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

Christian teaching cannot settle for getting us to whitewash our lives with some external principles about God. We are provoking an interior transforming encounter with God.

Have you ever noticed that when we teach our children about God, or much of anything else, how many different ways we have to teach the same thing? We can't talk them to death, their attention span is limited.

So we draw pictures. We make things. We sing songs. We plant seeds. All sorts of things to get what we are trying to teach inside of them. We pray that the mystery of God will grab hold of their souls. Then we grow up, become adults, and decide that words about God are all we need. Now it's okay to talk each other to death.

Teachers, all I can tell you is that if our goal is to form people for God, and not educate people about God, our words are never enough. How will you get those commandments upon the heart?

It means teaching prayer, scripture meditation, and group discussion as ways of encountering God. Being told about him will only get us part of the way there.

**4. The ways of God which find a place within us then need to shape the world around us.**

*Impress (these commandments) on your children,* says Moses. How? Make them a part of the conversation when you sit at home and when you walk down the road, from morning until evening.

In other words don't restrict God to Sunday school. He needs to shape the lives of families all day long, in the house and out in the world.

He's not only the God of bedtime prayers. He's the God of lost little league games, trips to the doctor, and choices at the grocery store.

Some years ago a three year study was done with 500 congregations to answer one question: What is the most important factor in developing a mature faith? The number one answer was the kind of religious life practiced in the family. But it wasn't that the family was religious in general. For children it was the frequency that children talked with parents about faith, the frequency of family devotions, and the frequency with which children and parents together were involved in efforts to help other people.

Moses also told people not to stop with their houses, but to write the commandments on their gates. That's a figurative way of saying the places of your business and public life.

That means in our teaching we have to help adults and teens draw lines between the stories of the faith and places we live our lives. How do love God in the running of a business? How do you love God while attending high school? What does loving God mean for living in this community? That's not "extra credit" after we've learned the Bible. Answering those questions is what it means to learn the Bible.

## **Conclusion**

That study I mentioned a few minutes said one more thing that was quite surprising.

Family religiousness was the most important factor in developing a mature faith. But only slightly less important was the degree to which to which people were involved in the Christian Education (Discipleship Development) program of their church. It's time to teach! But just as importantly it's time to learn! If you are craving a deeper faith, one hour a week in worship by itself isn't going to get it done. What are you going to do to put yourself in an environment where good teaching can happen? Today is a great day to make that commitment between yourself and the Lord.