

If only they had such a mind.... Deuteronomy 5 28-33

Portions adapted from "Draw Near" by K. Edward Skidmore @ Sermon Central.Com

Did you get everything you wanted for Christmas?
Have you ever wondered what God may want for Christmas?

With all us humans down here swapping presents back and forth, what gift might we give God? What can we give to the person who literally has everything? Having created our entire world, God owns every physical thing in it; even that which makes up our physical bodies, that which came from the dirt in the ground – God's dirt. (Psalm 24:1, Psalm 50:7-23).

Which reminds me of a story...

God was once approached by a scientist who said, "Listen God, we've decided we don't need you anymore. These days we can clone animals, transplant organs, grow test tube babies and do all sorts of things that used to be considered miraculous."

That is true, God replied, I have given you great abilities and you have done much that is miraculous. But are you sure you don't need me anymore? How about we put your theory to the test with a competition to see who can make a human being, the old fashioned way.

"*Fine*" says the scientist as he bends down to scoop up a handful of dirt."

"*Whoa!*" says God. "*Not so fast. Get your own dirt.*"

Let's get back on track. So while God owns and has the right to possess every physical thing, there is actually only one thing that God doesn't possess, which in fact God refuses to possess, which is us; our minds our spirits.

Having made humanity in His own image and having given us the right to rule the earth, God has always refused to own us, to enslave us. But, being made in His image, made to be like Him, the one thing God wants most is a loving family relationship with us. The one thing that the devil could steal from God, which he accomplished in the Garden of Eden, was our ability to have that uncompromised relationship with God. God refuses to enslave us, but Satan had no qualms against enslaving us under sin and the fear of death (Galatians 4:4-7, Hebrews 2:14-15).

Ever since the days of Adam, God has been working both to free us and to restore our relationship to Himself. Are you surprised? Have you ever deeply considered why God wants such a relationship with you and not just any relationship but a **family relationship!**

Are you surprised God loves you so much that – as we learned last week – He was even willing to give His own life in exchange for yours, just for a chance to reestablish that family relationship with you?

Reading through the Bible, you cannot escape this continuous declaration of God's love and His desire to restore your lost relationship with Himself. Remember, *For God so loved the world that He gave us His one and only Son.* ? I shared another verse like this with you last week. Think of Paul's comments in his letter to the Galatians in the context of God's wanting to restore that family relationship with you.

God sent his Son... born under the law,
in order to redeem those who were under the law,
so that we might receive adoption as [His] children
Galatians 4:4-5

*Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit
of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"
So you are no longer a slave but a child,
and if a child then also an heir, through God.
Galatians 4:6-7*

⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

So many people misunderstand, misconstrue the stories of the Old Testament as presenting a hateful, rule bound, vengeful God, who tries to bind humans under rules and regulations. They claim that God only grew a heart in the New Testament; that Jesus as the manifestation of a loving God is completely different from the mean Old Testament God.... All of which is completely untrue.

Everywhere in the stories of the Old Testament you will find evidence of God's love and His desire to restore that broken family relationship with us. It was the God of the Old Testament who from the foundations of our world set in place the plan that could one day restore His broken family. From that very first law given to our parents in the Garden of Eden, warned that they would die from the eating the forbidden fruit, still they ate; and while they

did not physically die, they did die spiritually ... they were spiritually now separated – by their disobedience – from their relationship with God.

But with their separation came an immediate response, that very first promise, that one day the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, thus undoing Satan's theft and restoring their broken relationship with God.

You know the rest of the stories from there, God chose Abram through whom He could create nation through which the promised seed could come – to bless all people.

God then liberated that enslaved nation of Israel, bringing them to His Promised Land where they could serve as priests to the world and through whom the promised seed would come. Sadly however their history has been mostly of disobedience and disregard for the God who established them as a nation.

Which brings us to today's text. In Deuteronomy chapter 5, after 40 years of wilderness wandering brought about by their initial refusal to enter, God through Moses has brought the people of Israel back to the border of the Promised Land. Moses now once again rehearses with them the history of their travels from Mount Sinai where they first received the Law. This is where we pick up Moses' conversation with the people reminding them of God's desire to have a special relationship with them.

***If only they had such a mind as this,
to fear me and to keep all my commandments
always, so that it might go well with them
and with their children forever!***

Deuteronomy 5:28-29

Moses told the people... the Lord said to me: *'I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. **If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever!***

Deuteronomy 5:28-29

The Hebrew word, here translated as "fear" does not mean "to be afraid of," but rather to love, respect, be in awe of. **God was saying to his friend Moses, that He greatly desired the people of Israel follow His commandments not for His sake, but for their sake so that they and their children might long prosper in**

the Promised land. God wanted the best of all possible lives for the nation of Israel, but you know the rest of the story, how God's love was not returned back to Him.

We know enough about God's Nature to believe that He LOVES us. We know that He is willing to SAVE us. But to think that He really ENJOYS the idea of being close to us ... to think that God actually TREASURES time spent with us ... now that is something hard for me to understand.

Today let's consider some familiar scenes from the Old Testament in a new way; looking for evidence of God seeking that special relationship with us.

First, let's examine the scene at the burning bush where **God initiates a relationship** with Moses.

In the beginning of Exodus we find Moses minding his own business, tending sheep on the back side of the desert, when suddenly God catches his attention with a bush that won't stop burning. Moses could have ignored this strange sight, but instead, he drew near. And when he did, God spoke to him --- audibly --- from the bush.

This is where God tells Moses to go back to Egypt and rescue the Israelite slaves. But have you ever noticed the REASON God wanted to liberate these people? God tells Moses, "*I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: **When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.***" (Exodus 3:12)

"This mountain" was Mount Horeb, the Mountain of God, also known as Mount Sinai. God wanted to bring His People to His Mountain for one purpose ... so they could draw close to Him in worship. Which takes us to the next familiar scene of Moses before Pharaoh where **God issues an Invitation**

Most of us are familiar with the scene of Moses standing before Pharaoh demanding: *Let my people go!* But listen to what Moses said to Pharaoh "*Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, **Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.***" (Exodus 5:1)

I must admit, I usually skipped past this verse thinking it was merely a ruse on Moses' or God's part – to make Pharaoh think that his slaves might eventually return to Egypt – because I knew that God intended to get His People resettled in the Promised Land. But now I see that the FIRST thing God wanted was a worship celebration. Do you see how significant that is? God wanted to "party" with his people! It's as if He sent the Israelites a special Invitation to a celebration given in His honor.

Having gotten them out of Egypt and to His mountain, now listen to the loving way God opens His heart to show how much he values His invited guests.

***I bore you on eagles' wings
and brought you to myself.
if you ... keep my covenant, you
shall be my treasured possession***
Exodus 19:3-6

[God told Moses], " Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how **I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself**. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be **my treasured possession** out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a **priestly kingdom and a holy nation**." Exodus 19:3-6

Do you see how God revealed His heart to His people? He called them **His treasured possession**. He honored them by calling them a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**. He showed how much he cared for them by saying, **I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself**.

Getting these beloved guests to His celebration was important to God. Think of all the trouble He went to in order to clear the way for His People to attend: He sent Moses and Aaron to tell Pharaoh "Let my people go." He sent 10 plagues to convince Pharaoh to just say "yes!" He parted the Red Sea, led the way with a pillar of fire and cloud. He fed them manna every morning and made sure their clothes wouldn't wear out.

He did all this in order to get them back to Mount Sinai ... the same place where he originally spoke to Moses from a Burning Bush. Exactly 3 months after they left Egypt, the Israelites set up camp at the foot of the mountain.

Of course we know of Mt. Sinai as the place where God gave the TEN COMMANDMENTS to His People. But let's look at some less-familiar details about the events at Mount Sinai, where **God honors the peoples' response** to His invitation.

Picture this: the invited guests have finally assembled at the foot of the Mountain of God. They have spent 3 days preparing for this event. They are wearing freshly cleaned clothes. They have all been through special cleansing ceremonies. They are finally ready to meet the ONE who invited them to His party. They are ready to meet the ONE who expressed His love for them and who rescued them with power and miracles.

Then God Himself came and spoke to them. Here is the description of this scene in Exodus 19:

Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder.

Exodus 19:17-19

This entire group of people ... probably about 2 million of them ... actually HEARD the voice of God. Do you know what God said to them? **He was giving them the 10 Commandments.** Most of us know that the 10 commandments were chiseled on stone tablets that God gave to Moses on top of the mountain. (*Actually God gave him two sets of tablets --- since Moses threw down and shattered the first in anger because of the Israelites' sin*). What we may not realize is that **before the 10 Commandments were ever written in stone, God himself RECITED them out loud to all the people!** (Ex. 20:1-17). God did not want them to have any doubt about where those commandments came from. He wanted them to know His heart and His nature FIRST HAND. God wanted to connect with His people in a direct and personal way.

God wants --- in fact, he passionately wants --- to connect with us in a very real and personal way. **God initiates the relationship. He issues the invitation.** But then **God will wait for our response** to Him. What happened next shows us that God will not force us into a personal relationship with Himself.

Moses and God had planned a worship experience unlike any ever planned before. In a very literal way, God showed up at church and preached the sermon himself. But listen to how the Children of Israel responded when God spoke to them:

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.' Exodus 20:18-19

These people actually HEARD the very voice of God. But such a close connection with God was NOT what they wanted. The same guests God had invited to His party basically said, "*God scares us, we will just stay over hear while you and God have your conversation way over there..*" What a bitter disappointment that must have been to the God who wanted to draw near to His people.

This was a heart-breaker to both God and Moses. But look at the gracious way God responded. Moses told the people, *The LORD heard you when you spoke to me and the LORD said to me, "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good .*

But, the next thing God said shows his deep disappointment. you can almost hear God sighing as He says: ***If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all***

my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children for ever! Deuteronomy 5:28-29

These people had a certain kind of fear of God, but it was not the right kind. They were terrified of God. They wanted to avoid him. This showed that they still did not understand the nature of God. What a sad and anti-climactic event we see here. The Worship Service that might have been greater than anything ever experienced before ended --- not with a bang --- but with a whimper ... God said, "Moses, send them back to their tents. The party is over."

But the story doesn't end there. Look at the difference between the response of the People and the response of Moses. The People drew back from God. But Moses drew near. God said to Moses: *"Go, tell them to return to their tents. But you stay here with me..."* Deuteronomy 5: 30-31. And that's exactly what Moses did. While the people went to their tents, Moses stayed up on the mountain enjoying direct communication with His God.

But if the people had stayed there with God, how different might have been their relationship with Him? Moses stayed and Look at the relationship that grew between him and God: ***The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.*** Exodus 33:11

God spoke with Moses *as a man speaks with his friend*; that is what God really wants for all of us. God wants an actual FRIENDSHIP with you and with me. That is the true nature of our God.

Anyone who takes the trouble to learn God's true nature will find out that God wants to have a close, personal, family relationship with His People. He is a God who wants to carry us on Eagles' wings. He is a God who values all of us as His treasured possessions.

- Just like with Moses at the Burning Bush, God has instigated a connection with you ... will you come closer to Him or will you walk away?
- Just like with the Children of Israel, God has invited us to join Him in a wonderful Worship Celebration ... will you accept His invitation or will you stay away?
- And just like with the Children of Israel, God won't force Himself on anyone. He will honor your response.

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| If you draw near to God, He will draw near to you. James 4:8 |
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This new year, I offer to you the most important resolution you could ever make. As James the brother of Jesus said, *if you draw near to God, He will draw near to you.* That's the only thing God really wants from you. That's the only thing you can really give Him. *If only you would have such a mind as this.*

Let's pray.