

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

“What do you want from me?”

Is that a question you’ve ever asked a boss, a coach, or your teachers? It’s a good question because if you don’t know what they want from you, you can’t make them happy. And if they’re not happy with you, you’ll never get that promotion or the chance to play in the big game or achieve the good exam results you want.

“What does God want from you and me?”

Thankfully we don’t have to guess what God wants from us, the way you might have to guess what Christmas present will make a loved one happy. In our Old Testament lesson the prophet Moses tells us clearly what God wants from you and me. Nothing! Everything! Let’s make some sense of these seemingly opposing thoughts.

Our text from Deuteronomy is an address that Moses gave to the Israelites after 40 years of wandering in the desert. As you know their journey started in Egypt. The Israelites had lived there for 400 years but when the pharaoh started using them as slaves, God sent Moses to lead them out of that land and back to Canaan. Their journey from Egypt to Canaan should have taken at most two years, including the eleven-month stop at Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments and to build the tent-like church called the tabernacle. So why did it take the Israelites 40 years to cover approximately 249 miles, a little less than the distance from Lullingstone to Liverpool? Do you remember what happened when Moses sent twelve spies into the Promised Land? Some brought back a positive report: “Canaan looks like a great place to live. However,” ten of the spies continued, “we’ll never live there. The inhabitants are much too strong.” Because most of the people agreed with this assessment and disregarded God’s promise to be with them and to give them the power to conquer the land, God finally said: “Have it your way.” And every adult who sided with those ten spies was doomed to wander the wilderness until each died. That took forty years.

When the children, who had seen their parents die within sight of the Promised Land became adults, it was their turn to cross the Jordan River and take what God had promised to give them. But they must have been hesitant. Would all go according to plan, or would they inadvertently make God angry as their parents had done? What did God want from them anyway? That’s the question Moses

answered in our text. In one sense God wanted nothing from his people. Moses said: “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day.... For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: he doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.... He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen.” (Deuteronomy 10:14, 15, 17, 18, 21).

God didn’t expect anything from the Israelites and he doesn’t expect anything from us because there is nothing we have that he doesn’t already own. The earth and all that is in it – palm trees, mountain lakes, thoroughbred horses that love to thunder down race courses, diamonds that sparkle on our fingers – it all belongs to God as do the skies and the stars above. So our offerings don’t make God richer. Our prayers don’t give him information that he doesn’t already have. Our hymns of praise can’t top the splendid music that pours forth constantly from angels. No, God doesn’t need anything from us; instead he gives us everything that we have and everything that we are. He does so because he loves us.

God loves us very much just as he loved the Israelites. His point, through Moses’ opening words, is to get the Israelites and us to realise that whatever blessings we enjoy are gifts of his grace. We can’t earn God’s love or favour.

While it’s true that God wants nothing from us it’s also true that he wants everything from us. Listen again to Moses. “And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?... Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave,...” (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13, 20).

Confused? How can it be that on one hand God wants nothing from us and on the other hand he wants everything – our heart and soul in true devotion to him? The better question to ask is why wouldn’t we want to give God our all considering what he did for the Israelites and for us? He had rescued the Israelites from slavery and brought them safely to the Promised Land. He rescued us from sin and has given us eternal life. He has also promised to give

us exactly what we now need for each day – the right amount of food and the right amount of strength. Holding fast to the God of the Bible and his Word then is like holding firmly to a life jacket after a shipwreck. If you don't hold fast, if you let go, you'll drown – not enjoy more freedom because you now can swim with both hands. But that's of course what Satan wants us to think. He would have us swim as far away from God's Word as we can.

So what will our life look like if we're giving God everything we have? It means paying attention when we come to Sunday services because we're eager to learn God's will. The opposing attitude would be to continuously check our watch or to daydream as if church is keeping us from something more important. Giving God everything also means serving our neighbour. So when someone at work or school pours out their heart to us, we listen intently putting their needs before our own agenda. Giving God everything also means giving him our fears and our worries – trusting that he will deal with them. So you see what a blessing it is to cling to God?

And yet a Gallup survey has revealed a worrying trend in our culture. According to this survey, the evidence seems to indicate that there are no clear behavioural patterns that distinguish Christians from non-Christians in our society. We all seem to be marching to the same tune, looking to the shifting standards of contemporary culture for the basis of what is acceptable conduct. What everybody else is doing seems to be our only ethical norm.

And yet what God wants from us is clear. He wants our heart and our love. He wants us to live according to his commands as we honour our parents, turn away from sexual temptation, and let go of our resentment towards others. He wants this from us because he has given us his love and his forgiveness. He's also pledged himself to us and to our future. If we keep clinging to the God of the Bible as we would to that life jacket, he will bring us safely into heaven's harbour. In Jesus name. Amen.