



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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September 17, 2006
15th Sunday after Pentecost
Proverbs 9:1-6
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 4:1,2,6-8
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 119c
Second Lesson: Ephesians 6:10-20
Gospel: Mark 7:1-8,14,15,21-23

Come to Wisdom's Banquet!

Are there some people that when they talk you just kind of tune out everything they are saying because you know it is not really going to be worth listening to? Or maybe every now and then you come across people that are that way. Let's say you are in the big city and you see someone with a basket out in front of them and a sign that says, "Will dispense financial advice for donations." Do you think you are really going to go to a beggar to tell you how to invest your money? Or, you turn on the television and there is someone who is about 5'2", 350 lbs. and they are going to tell you how to get fit. Are you going to sit and watch the rest of the show? Or do you think you might turn the channel because there is something better to listen to?

We all know people that we don't listen to and we all can think of examples where there are people that we have listened to and we wish we wouldn't have, but we are reminded of a great and glorious truth that applies to every single day of our lives, and that truth is that our God wants to speak to us and he wants us to listen. Just as Moses said to the Israelites, our God says to us, "Hear the Word of the Lord." Then he reminds us that because it is the Word of the Lord, don't add to it, don't subtract from it, but guard it carefully. See to it that you regard it as the Word of God and guard what is in there. Then secondly he says, "Don't just guard it, but make sure you are careful to observe it faithfully as you go about living your daily life."

The Words I just read to you a little bit ago come from Deuteronomy. I don't know if you remember, Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. That is who God inspired to write those first five books. Deuteronomy is the fifth one. Deuteronomy is kind of like the second giving of the Law when Moses goes over everything that had happened for the people of Israel right before they are going to go into the Promised Land because the generation that thumbed their nose at God and said, "We can never conquer this land because they are too great and we are like grasshoppers that died when they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years." Now the next generation is about to go in and take that land flowing with milk and honey that God had promised that Abraham's decedents would possess.

So as they are about to go in, Moses gathers them all together and he goes over everything in the verses right before Chapter 4. He had gone over everything God had done for them—how he had taken care of them, how he had seen to it that their clothes didn't wear out even though they couldn't go shop at the desert Gap. He kept their clothes for those 40 years from wearing out. God had taken care of them. And then he even points them to God's grace and he says, "Be careful to do all these things when

you go into the land that the Lord is giving you.” They weren’t taking it. He said God was giving it to them. As he was about to tell them about all the decrees, he points out that God is a God of love and a God of mercy and a God of grace and the way we respond to that grace is to listen to his Word. As Moses was telling the Israelites, treat it not as the Words of Moses, but what it actually was—the Words of God. This is what God had told Moses to tell the Israelites and he wants them to listen carefully to it because God himself—the one who had done all these things for them—is talking to them. He says, “Because it is God talking here, be careful that you don’t add to it. Be careful that you don’t subtract from it.”

If you know the rest of the history of the children of Israel and what happened, they did subtract from it. God had said, “Completely drive out all the Canaanites that are in the land so that they will not lead you astray.” They conquered the land until they could live in it comfortably but didn’t drive them all out, and they subtracted from God’s Word by not keeping his commands and it ended up costing them. The Canaanites led them astray to the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth and Chemosh and Molech and all these other gods that corrupted the children of Israel.

In our gospel lesson today, we heard how the children of Israel added to the Word of God. They elevated the traditions of men—what men said about the best way to honor God and the best way to worship God. They put it in the same level of Scripture and you heard Jesus’ stinging rebuke to them—“*You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me’*” (Matthew 15:7,8). Moses encouraged them to listen to the Word of God—not add to it, not subtract from it—and in many ways they failed.

Adding or subtracting to God’s Word is something God is serious about. If you have read the book of Revelation, about two or three verses from the end of the book, God says, “John write, *If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life*” (Revelation 22:18,19). God is serious about his Word and he wants his Word to be listened to faithfully and followed faithfully.

The question for us is as we listen to God’s Word, do we add to it or subtract from it at times? Are we tempted to do this? Are we tempted to add to God’s Word to say there is only one right way to do certain things and it is the way we prefer and if we do it any other way, we are doing things wrong, and it’s wrong and you can’t do that because it’s wrong. Especially if it is an area where God hasn’t said, “This you must do.” We are free to worship in many different ways, but if we start laying down laws saying you can’t do this or you can’t do that in worship where God hasn’t spoken, then we are playing God. We are adding to his Word. We may well be tempted to do that at times.

We might also be well tempted in many times and in many ways to subtract from God’s Word. God and his Word at times is very clear that what you and I think, say and do is sinful and there are many times that you and I are very inclined to make excuses for it or to simply say that might have been true back then, but it’s not really as true now. If you were to do this then we might say, “Yes, that is sinful. But when I am doing it, it’s

not quite so bad because..." We can come up with all kinds of excuses and rationalize why "it was really good for me to have that affair because I really needed that in my life at that point in time. Maybe for someone else it isn't, but for me it is." God says "No." It is sin. Or, we might say, "I just need to get away from it all. I don't have the time for God and his Word. I will just have to wait until later to get back to that." God says "No. *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing*" (Hebrews 10:25). Or we might say, "I have done all these things and I have all these possessions. I really need to use them. I don't have time to give to God or the resources to give to God." God says, "Honor me with the firstfruits of your labors."

It doesn't matter what it is, you and I are all tempted at times to subtract from God's Word by saying that our sins are not sins. It's just the way we are. But it doesn't matter that it is just the way we are, because it is still sin.

God tells us, "Don't add to it. Don't subtract from it." And yet, you and I at times are very, very inclined to do so. Because of it, you and I deserve quite simply just to go to hell. We don't deserve the sun to rise tomorrow. We don't deserve the rain to fall. We don't deserve the crops to grow. We don't deserve food on our table. We don't deserve any of the things that our God gives to us day after day after day out of his love. Sometimes we subtract from God's Word by looking at the things he gives us day after day after day out of his love and acting as though we deserve them from God and that if we don't get exactly what we want from God, there must be a problem with God.

A careful reading of the Word of God at times is very frightening to us because we see ourselves for what we are. We are sinners. We deserve hell. When we understand that fully, when we see that frequently, then it is amazing to consider that God loved us so much that he kept his Word even though we have not kept it. He sent his Son to take away the sins that we commit and be perfect where we are imperfect. He sent his Son to take away our sins and carry them to the cross so that they are punished so that we are not punished. This is what is so amazing about God's grace. He tells us what to do and we do the other, and then he sends his Word into our hearts to awaken us—this knowledge that we deserve hell—and then he follows it right up by telling us that he has given us heaven. He has taken away our sins. He has made us his own. As we understand that fully, then what he also does, what the Spirit does in our hearts is lead us to want to carefully do what God has commanded us to do. Not because there are rules that we have to keep so that God will love us, but because he already has loved us and has taken away our sins completely. Now we live for him. That is what Moses said to the Israelites. "*Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations*" (Deuteronomy 4:6). The nations will look and see that you live with a trust and a confidence in God and follow his Word because you have seen his promises, and it will stick out to people.

The same thing happens with us today in spite of all the things that we have done. We can look at the people we come into contact with daily and they can tell us—when we tell them what they are doing is sin—they can say to us, "You know what? You aren't perfect. Who are you to tell me?" We can look them in the eye and say, "I am not perfect, but I am forgiven and I want you to be forgiven." We can live with this confidence that God takes away our sins, not because of who we are, but because of

who he is. We can live in this confidence that we live for God to thank him for his gift of salvation. We can live in this confidence trusting that he will keep all of his promises—even the ones that we don't see being fulfilled in the time or the way that we would like them to be fulfilled. We still live with a quiet trust—the childlike trust that if God has said it, he will keep his promise. When that day of evil comes that was talked about in Ephesians 6, when the devil throws his temptations at us and we stand firm in that full armor of God and put our trust in God and other people see us enduring things that, quite frankly at times, I wonder how Christians endure some of the things that they endure. I see it though and then I know God is greater than our weaknesses and God helps us to overcome what we cannot endure on our own. As we live with this quiet trust in God, God will bring us the opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others. God will bring us the opportunities when people ask us, "How can you do that? Why do you have that confidence?" We can tell them because we have a Savior who lived in our place and died in our place. We have a Savior who loves us with an everlasting love. That is why we do what we do—not because we have to, but because the gospel has touched our hearts and moves us to live for Christ.

And as we share with others who God is and what he has done for us, we are blessed by God at times to see the Holy Spirit work in the lives of others. We are blessed as we encourage other believers and see them grow in their faith and see them get through things that at times are beyond what we think we could bear. We are blessed as we see those who don't know Christ have their eyes widened as they just understand what the love of God actually is. We are blessed to do the coolest thing in the world—tell others that Jesus loves them, lived for them, died for them and was raised again because he wants them to be in heaven.