

“Worship Continued”  
Deut. 6:4-9; 1 Thess. 5:11-25;  
Mark 7:1-8

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Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God. Those initial words from the Deuteronomy reading are words that shout out at us to think again about who God is. Hear, O Israel. When it says “Hear, O Israel,” I don’t think just of the Israelites of the Old Testament. When it says “Hear, O Israel,” I think it’s saying, “Hear, you people of God.” The Lord, our God is one Lord. It’s inviting us to hear.

This is such a famous passage that they use one word to help us remember it, and it is the word in Hebrew for *hear*. It’s Shema. So this is the Shema, and it invites us to remember who God is. But it doesn’t stop there. It goes on to give us an assignment to love the Lord with our heart, our soul, and our might. There are some interesting things about that phrase, the assignment that we are given to love the Lord with our heart, our soul, and our might.

If you look at the word *love* in Hebrew, it’s the word that can be used for the love between husband and wife, parents and children, close friends. What I notice about that is that it’s not a word that is an objective way of doing things. It’s not just a belief. It’s not just something that I do with my mind. It’s got a sense of passion to it, of involving all of who we are, involving our feelings as well as our thinking. So it says, “love with our heart, our soul, and our might.”

Loving with our *heart* is a poetic way of saying to love with our consciousness, with our spirit, with the things that make us more than a rock, with our animated selves. We bring that part of ourselves to this assignment. The *soul*, if we look at that, is saying you are an existing being, so it’s trying to get at the whole of who we are. Our *might* is our ability to do things, to bring to life.

So what I think it’s encouraging us to think about is that as we worship God, as we give our allegiance to God, as we honor God, as we venerate God, as we love God, we bring all of who we are. We’ve been talking about that idea of worshiping God and this phrase invites us to remember that we bring all of who we are to worshipping God.

Not only does it say we bring all of who we are; it says to do it when we go away, and when we come, and when we lie down, and when we rise. It’s not something we are invited to do just when we come to church on a Sunday morning or in a particular gathering. Here in Deuteronomy, it invites us to do it all the time, to remember that it’s not something that is just momentary.

When I went to Taizé this summer, one of the things they did was they had songs that we sang. They were simple songs, but they were repetitive. They didn’t ever really stop. There’s a reason for that. The idea was that once you begin to sing it, it doesn’t need to stop. As you go out you remember it, it goes with you. And in doing so, if we

don't get frustrated that the song is doing that and allow it to work within us, it's a way of continuing our worship, of recognizing that our worship continues on.

So Deuteronomy, I think, invites us to think about how worship goes on. In the Thessalonians passage, as well, there's that invitation to give thanks always, to rejoice. Again, I think it's an invitation to continue on with what we've been doing and to continue to bring the worship into our lives rather than leaving it at church. There are those times where you do something that you've been doing a lot, but you now focus on it. That's what it's saying about worship.

At the retreat yesterday, we were thinking about how we think about our relationship with God and how we worship God. We noted that oftentimes it feels like we come together a little bit on a Sunday morning to worship together, but most of our worship we're supposed to do on our own throughout the week. We thought about this idea of being together and alone, and how perhaps we have moved towards doing more of it alone than together. We also thought about the nature of the old monastic tradition where they would pray the hours, and how that was a way of coming from their aloneness together, to pray together throughout the day and keep that worship going in the lives of the participants.

We are invited to that kind of worship—to love God with our heart, our soul, our might. What it reminds me of as well, and I think that's where Paul goes in Thessalonians, is that it's not just a matter of always singing. It's not just the rejoicing and the thanksgiving. If we are really honoring God with our lives, then what Paul is suggesting is that we encourage one another and build each other up. He suggests that when we are honoring and caring about God we will be at peace among ourselves, kind and patient, to do good to one another and to all.

Part of it is lifting up and saying things to God, but if all we ever do is say things to God, is it really fully honoring God? Our worship includes honoring God with our lives, with who we are. Paul says to the Thessalonians, "Out of the grace you've been given in response to the gift of God's love, honor God with your life as well. Do good to each other and to all." In doing that we are also worshiping God. It is our worship continued from day to day as we live out that calling.

Paul is encouraging us in many ways to look at how we can help one another, to build one another up. There's a technique of planning which encourages you to look at your strengths and build upon them. That's what it seems Paul is saying. Build one another up. Take what's good and make that good better.

If I had my druthers, I would just stay there with the positive, but it feels to me like Jesus wants to warn us of a struggle we have with continuing to make our worship work throughout our lives, to allow our love to be of heart, soul, and might. He points at tradition. To some extent I think we have to figure out ways of doing things, but if we let those ways of doing things become what's important and we lose the heart of the

matter, then it's no longer valuable. Jesus goes on to note that what really matters is the heart, what's inside.

There was a story I heard about a family who every year would cook a turkey for Thanksgiving, but their traditional way of cooking the turkey was to take off the legs and make sure that it was just a certain size. It was, therefore, the way their family cooked turkey. One of the young people finally said, "This seems a little strange. Why do we do it this way?" So they asked their mother, and she said, "That's the way my mother taught me to do it." They went to their grandmother and asked, "Why do we do it this way?" Grandma said, "When I was young and newly married, I had a very small oven and we had to cut the turkey up to make it fit." Now, does it matter? We can get into things simply because that's the way we had to do it initially to get it to work, but things change. It doesn't necessarily continue to be the appropriate way to do things.

I also noticed this in another setting. When we were in England, I went to an Evensong. There was a wonderful choir doing the Evensong that evening. The music was beautiful, but there were very few people there and the choir itself engaged in singing, but between times it was obvious that they were there because they had to be there to do the song. It had become a form, and although the music was beautiful, the heart was not in it and it lost its meaning.

Jesus is inviting us to remember that it is a matter of our hearts. As we open ourselves to the grace of God and experience that love, it's a heartfelt response. In fact, if we aren't careful, we can have the form and lose the spirit. That's exactly what Paul talks about when he says, "Don't quench the spirit." It is our spirit, God's spirit—we don't want to quench it, we want to open up to it. We want to enable ourselves to be full of that spirit and worship in spirit and in truth.

So worship continued is not just each Sunday, but it's throughout our lives. It's a song of praise that sings out of our souls. Our hearts become so full of love that the love overflows to one another and to all. And as we use our might, the force of who we are to do the will of God, we love God and our neighbors as ourselves. Worship continued. Amen.