

Moses was near the end of his life. He knew that he wouldn't go into the Promised Land himself, but would die before the Israelites crossed over Jordan. And so, before they parted company, Moses wanted to impress on God's people how they could hold on to the truth of God's laws and decrees -- the most important message ever communicated.

And the first step was to "**Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you.**" I don't think I need to tell you, there's a difference between just hearing and listening. You can read your daily Bible chapter to check it off your to-do list without gleaning a single insight from it. You can sit in the pew and think about all you have to get done this week or just this afternoon and even recite your parts of the liturgy and prayers without giving them a thought. To hold on to God's Word we need to really listen. Actively listen. Ask questions. Dig for answers. Take notes in your Bible. Participate, even now.

And more than that, Moses didn't stop with just hearing the Word. He said "Don't just listen, but observe." Of course he didn't mean we should be spectators, just watch how others keep the Word, like we observe a football game. No, he meant observe like we should observe the speed limit -- that is keep it! Do what the Word says! Or as Jesus put it, "**Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it!**"

Why should we? Because it's a matter of life and death. Moses said, "**Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.**" Implied, of course, is "Don't follow them and you'll die without seeing the Promised Land"—a message that may have been personal for Moses who would die outside the Promised Land because he didn't observe what God commanded.

Sometimes I think we view the commands God gives as a burden, as if God's law were some sort of killjoy keeping us from enjoying life. But God gives his commands to bless us and give us life.

A little boy was riding his tricycle furiously around the block, over and over again. Finally a policeman stopped and asked him why he was going around and around. The boy said that he was running away from home. So the policeman asked why he kept going around the block. The boy responded, "Because my mom said that I'm not allowed to cross the street." The point? Obedience keeps you close to those who love you.

But how well do you obey? Do you love God with an undivided heart? Do you hunger and thirst for his Word, just biding the time until you can dig into it again? Or do you view your personal devotion as one more thing that has to be done? Do you even do that much? Are you always glad when someone says to you, "Let's go to the house of the Lord!?" Or can you think of a number of things you'd really rather be doing right now?

Imagine you wrote a love poem for someone you cared deeply about and you sat down to read it to them and pour out your heart. And as you did, that person reached for the remote and started surfing or started to trim their nails or work on a sudoku puzzle. "No, no. Go on. I'm listening." Wouldn't you rightly be hurt? Think how we must hurt God by the way we treat his Word with such ho-hum attitudes. "**Follow [God's decrees and laws] so that you may live and**

*may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.*"? Then we surely deserve to die and be left out of the heaven that the Lord, the God of our fathers is giving.

But thank God that his Word is not all laws, but also decrees. Just think of all the times God decreed his love for his people through Moses. He rescued his people out of Egypt and decreed that just as the angel of death had passed over their homes by the blood of the Passover lamb, so God's wrath would pass over his people by the blood of the Lamb of God who takes a way the sins of the world! -- the blood shed on the cross.

Just as God miraculously provided safe passage from death to life through the Red Sea, so too he would miraculously provide safe passage from eternal death to life through his own son. Just as they did nothing to save themselves from the poisonous venom coursing through their veins, but simply looked to the bronze serpent lifted up on the pole, so too they didn't need to do anything to save themselves from the deadly sin polluting their souls, but simply look to the Son of God lifted up on a cross.

As he provided water from the rock for their thirst, he provided the Living Water of Christ for their souls. As he gave them bread from heaven, he gave them Living Bread. And the list could go on and on... The Books of the Law is a bit of a misnomer, with all those gospel promises, isn't it?

Jesus took our many failures to pay attention to God's Word -- as we've been distracted by the cares and worries of this life -- all on himself. He took all our failures to obey God's Law or believe his Gospel -- focusing on our desires or our fears instead -- all on himself. He suffered the penalty of hell that those failures deserve. And on the cross he gave his perfect record of faithfully hearing, obeying and sharing God's Word to you and me.

And as we observe those gospel decrees of his forgiveness, we will not die, but will live. And we will go in and take possession of the the land that the Lord, the God of our fathers, is giving us -- that is, our Promised Land of heaven.