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SERMON TITLE: **God's Sublime Law: How Quickly We Forget**
SCRIPTURE: **Deuteronomy 31-32 selected**
DATE: **June 2, 2019**
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also 2 Timothy 3:16-17

When you go somewhere on vacation, for example, I love Yosemite Park. The waterfall when you enter the trail is incredible. We hiked alongside on the Misty Trail which goes along the edge of the waterfall. We ate a picnic at the top. We saw a rainbow arched over the waterfall at the bottom. I could not get enough. It was sublime. In comparison to it, everything else is small.¹

If you have been to Yosemite, do you think the waterfall in itself is sublime? Or do you think it is you who feels that it is sublime?

Or, consider this family's experience. They live in Gatlinburg. One morning out on their deck they see a bear.² It's not four feet from them, walking back and forth on the rail of their deck. They could have touched her. Her cub shows up, following the bear, climbs a tree; wild animals as calm as can be—you are talking softly among yourselves, filming the bears (making sure your doors are locked!) and they simply go about their business.

It is magnificent. Do you think it was your feelings that made you exclaim how marvelous it was? Or that the bears, in themselves are sublime?

Is the reality of the waterfall itself sublime? Or is it your feelings that make it sublime?

Is the bear a marvelous, inspiring creature of God itself, or is it your feelings from the once-in-a-lifetime close proximity to it that makes it marvelous?

If you say the waterfall is sublime, then it is the reality of the waterfall itself that makes you say that. If you say it is your feelings that create that reaction within you, then reality is subjective and can be twisted by your feelings or desires or words.³

¹ See VIDEO: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acP0Ly_TIC0 Yosemite National Park: Spring Waterfalls, accessed May 30, 2019.

² See VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nchRuLyku48&t=261s> Momma Bear and Cub On Porch in Gatlinburg – BJBourg, accessed May 30, 2019.

³ This concept goes back to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an English Romantic poet. See C. S. Lewis's introduction to *The Abolition of Man*, wherein he delineates between reality and feelings.

Is the mother bear and cub a marvelous, inspiring creation? Or is your feelings about being suddenly close to the wild animal that makes it a marvelous creation? Are the bears amazing? Or is it simply your feelings that make the bear inspiring?

What do you think?

If your feelings determine the reality of either the waterfall or the bears, then reality is subject to your feelings, desires, or words.

Let's keep that in mind as we open the Bible to Deuteronomy 31 and hear Moses speak about the words he has written, the first five books of the Bible.

²⁴When Moses had finished writing this entire body of instruction in a book, ²⁵he gave this command to the Levites who carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant: ²⁶"Take this Book of Instruction and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, so it may remain there as a witness against the people of Israel. ²⁷For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are." ³⁰So Moses recited this entire song publicly to the assembly of Israel:

Moses was writing down the commands as the people entered the land to become a nation. What kind of nation would they be? The words contain the truth. But people tend to not comply with the words. We tend toward willfulness. We act by feelings, desires, and our own intentions.

Moses helps us understand the Bible's reality. He writes a song, giving people the true picture so we realize what we have in the Book, and we are guided by it, rather than by our own feelings, desires, and inclinations. This was based on Moses' experiences of God. Moses, who met God on Mt. Sinai and talked to him regularly at the Tent of Meeting:

"Hear, O earth, the words that I say. . . . Let my words fall like rain on tender grass, like gentle showers on young plants. . . . ³¹I will proclaim the name of the LORD; how glorious is our God! ⁴He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is!

⁵*But [people] have acted corruptly toward him; when they act so perversely, are they really his children? ⁶Is this the way you repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless*

people? Isn't he your Father who created you? Has he not made you and established you?"

In the desert, the people complained bitterly to Moses, wanting to return to their slavery in Egypt because "at least there we were fed." They lost sight of their wonderful future being provided by God because they were God's children and were being led to freedom.

God is: The Rock (remember, they got water from the rock), God's deeds perfect, just, and fair. God is faithful and does no wrong; God is your Father who created you and established you. God in God's own self contains these qualities.

Think back over your life. How has God established you? What adversity has been defeated? What accomplishment have you achieved?

God is your Father who created you and established you. You are not creating God by your feelings or desires. God is this reality.

Moses says on the other hand, people are "foolish and senseless" because they do not respond to the reality. They had only short-term memory. In the desert they forgot that just as provision had come the day before, it would come again in the present day.

Nevertheless, God cared:

⁹For the people of Israel belong to the LORD. . . . ¹⁰He found them in . . . an empty, howling wasteland. He surrounded them and watched over them; he guarded them as he would guard his own eyes. . . . ¹³He let them . . . feast on the crops of the fields . . . and they drank the finest wine.

Was God watching over them because they *felt* he was, or because they experienced the reality of God's provision? Do you see the difference?

How do you determine truth? You hear today "that's *my truth*. You have *your truth*." But truth is not subjective, according to feelings or desires or inclinations.

When you say "that's my truth" what you are really saying is "I feel, I desire, I will live that way." That is willfulness, changing reality to fit their desires.

Here's how Moses puts it:

¹⁵But Israel soon became fat and unruly! . . . Then they abandoned the God who had made them; they made light of the Rock of their salvation. ¹⁶They stirred up his jealousy by worshiping foreign gods; they provoked his fury with detestable deeds. ¹⁷They offered sacrifices to demons, which are not God, to gods they had not known before, to new gods only recently arrived, to gods their ancestors had never feared. ¹⁸You neglected the Rock who had fathered you; you forgot the God who had given

you birth. ¹⁹The LORD saw this and drew back, provoked to anger by his own sons and daughters. . . .

God was in such pain over this. It was like a broken marriage. It was like someone you love having an affair. It was like complete abandonment. It was like irreconcilable differences. It was adultery.

It was setting up falsehood in place of reality. It was a lie.

God said:

²⁹Oh, that they were wise and could understand this! Oh, that they might know their fate!

When you step away from reality to be led by your own feelings and desires, God lets you do it. God allows you to feel the weight of your own willfulness until you are in deep trouble.

Then God says:

"Where are their gods they took refuge in? See now that . . . there is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deut 32:39).

When we live by our own reality, a wound is created. It might cover over for a while. Everything might seem okay for a while. Have you had an infection that didn't go away? The surface of the wound covers over with skin but underneath the infection is festering? The only way to heal the infection is to open the wound again and drain it. God wounds to bring the falsehood to the surface and deal with it, so that the truth can heal you. No one can do this but God.

⁴⁴ So Moses came with Joshua and recited all the words of this song to the people. ⁴⁵When Moses had finished reciting all these words . . . ⁴⁶he added: "Take to heart all the words of warning I have given you today. Pass them on as a command to your children so they will obey every word of these instructions. ⁴⁷These instructions are not empty words -- they are your life! By obeying them you will enjoy a long life in the land you will occupy when you cross the Jordan River."

To enter into the promises of God, to gain healing, to experience sublime joy, we must not forget God's Law. I hope you will hear Moses' words and consider the power of the truth.

AMEN