



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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PASSING THE BATON

by Steve Bringardner

~ Deuteronomy 6:1-9 ~

9:00 OPENING

We attempt to answer many questions during the course of Confirmation. Here is one we couldn't. It is asked by a little boy attending Sunday School: *"Why is Sunday School on Sunday? I thought it was supposed to be our day of rest."*

Here's another one, asked by a little girl writing a letter to God: *"What does it mean, 'You are a Jealous GOD'? I thought You had everything."*

Well, that one we might be able to answer with the passage of Scripture I'd like to read this morning:

¹These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ²so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. ⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.

INTRODUCTION

This passage is all about passing on what we believe to the next generation. That's what CONFIRMATION has been all about.

IMAGINE THIS SCENE: An old man (or woman) has an illness and is about to die. He gathers the family around and begins to speak about the greatest lessons he has learned in his life. And he implores them to pass these truths on to the next generation.

Maybe you've had that experience. Probably all of us have had significant people in our lives that have been our "teachers", "guides", "mentors". For me it was my grandfather. Were it not for his godly influence, I would not be standing before you today. But you know what's sad is that it skipped a generation in my family. It's not supposed to be that way. That's not to say my father didn't have a powerful influence & impact in my life. He did, in many ways. But I got my "spiritual bearings" and my "moral compass" from my grandfather.

MOSES had come to the end of his life. He was well over 100 years old. He gathers the people around and begins to draw together the greatest lessons God had taught him. That's what the ancient *Book of*

Deuteronomy is all about. The whole book takes place over a span of only about 30 days—long enough for Moses to get out to the people all they needed to know to head on into the Promised Land and live as God’s people.

What Moses was doing was “*passing the baton*”. Forty years had passed since the Children of Israel left Egypt. A generation had come and gone. The ones who were “little kids” at the time of the Exodus were now in mid-life and raising a whole new generation; probably some were already grandparents themselves.

What was uppermost in Moses’ mind at this point is how to get this 2nd generation and up-n-coming 3rd generation (and successive generations that would come after that) to walk in the ways of God and remain committed to Him.

PASSING THE BATON! Anybody ever run a relay race? You know that the crucial thing to winning the race is getting the baton into the hand of the upcoming runner without breaking stride, tripping, falling, or dropping the baton. It involves running alongside for a brief moment. . .then the up-n-coming runner sprints on by, and keeps the pace going

So, my message is directed to those whose job it is to PASS the baton: parents, teachers, role models, adult faith friends—anyone who has a chance to impact the life of a young person for the Kingdom of God. That’s everybody from about Row #2 on back.

My message is also directed to those sitting in Row #1, for you have a part in this too. You are not just passive recipients. You are not just sponges that soak up what’s passed on to you, then when no one is looking squeeze out all that good teaching and role modeling you’ve had. No, your role is to RECEIVE the baton. . .grab hold of it and run with all your might.

I. TO THE BATON-PASSERS

Can I say to you that what you do with the baton that is in your hand is tremendously important?!

A. If you expect “your children and their children after them to fear (i.e.: know + reverence) the Lord” [v. 2], you must do so yourself.

Likewise if you expect to enjoy God’s promise of “*long life*” (v. 2) and “*great increase*” (v. 3). Does that mean that everyone who leads an intentionally godly life automatically lives 10 years longer than everybody else and is well off financially?

NO! But who can deny that people who live according to the principles found in God’s Word are in general going to last much longer. Take the guidelines on how to deal with anger [“Do not let the sun go down on it”]. . .with alcohol [“moderation”; “avoid drunkenness”]. . .with marriage [“Do not be unequally yoked”; “The marriage bed should be kept pure”]. A good summary of what the Bible teaches and what our (UM) church stands for is the booklet *The Social Principles*.

God does not promise us immunity from life’s complexities, difficulties, hardships. But He does promise protection and blessing through them.

B. As passers of the baton, you must have the Word in your heart (v. 6).

We must be getting to know the Word—little by little—so that we can “impress it on our children” (v. 7). That means it can’t be the centerpiece on a coffee table. We must be actively involved with it. . .studying & memorizing it. . .getting it on the inside of us.....so that, in turn, we can get it on the inside of our children.

Here's another rendering of vv. 7-9: "Tell these things to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether you're at home or walking along the road; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Write them down as a reminder; inscribe them on the door frames of your homes and your city gates."

Too bad they won't let us do that last one anymore. But you can put up pictures, Christian symbols, Scripture verses, etc. around your house as a declaration of the God your household serves.

Remember when the Hebrew children put blood on their doorposts on the night of Passover—that the Angel of Death might pass over? Think of these objects and artifacts in the same way: as a reminder of WHO owns this property, this household, and the people who live in it—so that the "angels of darkness" will pass over.

C. Don't make "faith" a Sunday-only event. Make it part of your everyday life. Use every available teachable moment to pass along what you believe about God, Jesus, following Jesus, the Bible, prayer, etc.

Moses wanted to make sure the people wouldn't forget all they had seen. So he encouraged them to tell all the stories so they wouldn't forget God's great acts among them. I bet you have some stories in your family's history. Be sure to pass these along to the next generation. Otherwise, it's easy to forget God's faithfulness and provision.

D. And, by all means, don't SEND your kids to church. TAKE them. . .and get involved yourself. The last thing you want to do is send a double message: "This should be important to you; it's not to me."

You may feel like a failure. . .like you've missed the boat here. . .like you've let your family and your church family down. . .like you've passed the buck rather than the baton. . .like it's too hard to catch up. BUT, it's never too late. There is still time. God is a God of 2nd chances.

Everybody's been given a baton. And it's constantly being passed along to someone else: your children, your friends, people you barely know, people you know all too well. Every time you speak your faith you are passing it along to someone. This past winter, such a hand-off took place between two people you've seen around: *Todd Snyder* and *Alex L'Heureux* who is from Montreal. I'd like to invite both of them to come up and share just how it occurred.....

Everybody's been given a baton. No matter what you've accomplished in life, nothing will matter as much when you get down to the final moment as what of your faith & values you have passed along.

II. TO THE BATON-RECEIVERS

To you who are now RECEIVING the baton, let me direct you to the heart of this passage. In many respects, it is the sum total of Biblical faith. It's found in vv. 3-5. It is called the "*SHEMA*".

These few verses along with a couple others (cf. Deut. 11:13-21 & Numbers 15:37-41) form the Jewish confession of faith. Jews make a practice of reciting it twice each day—once in the morning and again at night.

It is a good confession of faith for us as Christians also.

The word *SHEMA* is Hebrew for "hear" which is the first word of the passage (cf. vv. 3 & 4).

As you look throughout the Bible, there are many times when GOD HEARS His people:

- He hears them groaning when they are in trouble. . .same with us
- He hears their prayers. . .and ours
- He hears them when they repent. . .us too

But there is another side to the coin. Since God hears His people, His people should also hear Him:

- The prophets say: “*Now hear the Word of the Lord*”.
- The psalmist says: “*Incline your ears*” (which means perk up your ears like a dog whose master is calling him to do something).

Hearing is the mode by which we receive God’s Word and by which faith is formed. Romans 10:17 says: “*Faith comes from hearing the message. . .*”

Moses is calling the people (and us) to HEAR. . .to listen up. . .to pay attention. So, listen today with your outer ears and your inner ears. . .

A. Be careful to obey. . .to follow what you have been taught [v. 3]

Confirmation is not graduation from—but into—the church. It doesn’t mean you don’t have to come anymore. Saying “I can be a Christian without going to church” is about like saying “I can be a doctor without going to med school”. . .or “an Olympic athlete without all the training.” If anything, it means coming more. . .staying plugged in. . .digging deeper into the things you don’t fully understand now. . . reinforcing the beliefs you are declaring today. . .getting the support you need to live as a believer in a non-believing world. . .developing the habits of a holy life. . .shaping the lifestyle of a disciple of Jesus Christ. . .finding ways to serve Him.

[*To those graduating from high school*] After graduation, there’s a part of your life that’s finished. Things will never be quite the way they were. Your job now is to take all the things you’ve been taught. . .all the values which have been instilled. . .and the wisdom & insight you’ve gained, and begin making your own choices. You won’t be perfect at it; you’ll fail from time to time. You may stray from what you’ve been taught for a time. . .you may even rebel against it and throw it overboard. . .or you may find that what seemed so silly and ridiculous was really “right on” and commit yourself to it wholeheartedly. I want you to remember that God’s grace & forgiveness is always abundant and available.

B. Remember: *The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*”

Could be translated: “*The LORD our God is one LORD*”

OR “*The LORD is our God, the LORD alone*” [v. 4]

The point is: He’s everybody’s God. He’s not just the God of the Israelites or the God of Christians. He’s the Sovereign Lord of the Universe. He is Master over everything. He *was* and *is* and *will continue to be*. This passage declares that the God of Abraham-Isaac-Jacob is the God of the whole earth. . .the only true God. Do you believe that this morning?

It’s the cornerstone of our belief, because there are many “gods” clamoring for our attention and worship. And WHOMEVER or WHATEVER is the “god” of your life is what will drive your life.

C. “*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” [v. 5]*

- With all your HEART: Make Him the central passion of your life.
- With all your SOUL: That’s all your desires & passions. . .your will. Make Him the center of all your decisions. Always ask: “*Is this something that would be pleasing to God?*”
- With all your STRENGTH: That’s your fortune. . .your energy. . .your talent. The things you give yourself to, do they glorify God?

~ *IN CONCLUSION* ~

FAMILY OF GOD. . .

Are you running the race with your baton held out to your children so they can grab it?

Is your heart bent on loving the Lord. . .embracing His Word. . .and passing it on?

Are you making it as easy as you can for your kids to receive the baton by modeling a lifestyle that is consistent with what you believe & teach. . .by making your faith an integral part of your everyday life. . .by showing them a God who is life-oriented, not just a concept?

If we want our children to follow God, we must make God a part of our everyday experiences. We must teach our children diligently to see God in all aspects of life (not just worship on Sundays).

CONFIRMANTS & GRADUATES. . .

Are you running the race with your hand outstretched to receive the baton? Nobody is going to pry open your fingers and make you hold onto it. You’ve got to embrace it for yourselves.

But let me tell you a little secret: If you hold on to the faith that is being passed along to you, it will hold on to you—no matter what life hands you.