

I

Something just felt off. It was a little after 10:00 at night, and I had just left the Atlanta airport after arriving home from California. As I cruised along the darkened freeway at 65 miles per hour, that feeling that something wasn't quite right only got stronger – that feeling that I wasn't exactly sure of my location, nor was I certain that I was headed in the right direction.

The rear-view mirror in my car has a little compass in one corner that digitally displays the direction of travel. I usually have a pretty good sense of direction, but I gave that little compass a long look.

The display said W, which meant I was traveling west. But that didn't make any sense to me. I know Athens is east of Atlanta, and I was certain I was on I-285, which meant that compass should have read E or NE, not W. To make matters even more confusing, every few minutes, I passed a freeway sign that indicated said that I was headed in the general direction of some place called Birmingham.

Then I remembered that my car is equipped with a navigation system that I almost never use. I pushed the button to bring up the digital map, and then I saw my mistake. I was indeed on 285. The only problem was that I was pointed in the exact opposite direction of home, and if I continued on my current course, I would end up on a grand circumnavigation tour of metro Atlanta. I took the next available exit,

turned around, and corrected my course. Fortunately, my little sojourn only cost me an extra ten minutes or so of time and fuel. But make no mistake, for those ten minutes, I was lost.

I had trusted in my own strength, my own internal sense of direction, my own gut feelings, and I had launched off confidently into the night in what I thought was the direction of home. But my internal compass was wrong. And if I hadn't turned to some of the other navigation tools at my disposal, like a compass, and freeway signs, and a map, if I hadn't looked outside myself for another reference point, I might still be on 285, just doing laps around Atlanta until Jesus returns.

II

All of us have become lost at some point or another. It happens. Even with digital compasses and in-dash navigation systems and cellular phones, even in 2019, it's still possible for us to get lost. Sometimes, our gut feelings or internal instincts turn out to be wrong. Sometimes, we forget about or just flat out ignore the navigational tools at our disposal. Hopefully, the worst that happens to us is a waste of a few minutes' time and fuel.

III

When we meet the people of God in our bible story this morning, they've been wandering not for ten minutes, but for nearly forty years. And during that 40 years, they've been undergoing a transformation. For the previous four

centuries, their ancestors had lived as slaves in the land of Egypt. But as Carol reminded us last week, ours is a God who sees, and God saw the misery of God's people in Egypt, the way that Pharaoh oppressed them. Ours is a God who comes down, and God came down and inhabited a burning bush. And ours is a God who sends. God sent Moses to Pharaoh, and then God sent God's people out of Egypt.

Getting the people out of Egypt was the easy part for God. That part only took half a heartbeat. But during these years in the wilderness, God has been hard at work trying to get the Egypt out of the hearts of God's people. They've been learning to trust in God's goodness. They've been learning to live as a free people. And the time is drawing near for the people of God to finally return home to the Land of Promise, and the time is drawing near for Moses to die and to be gathered to his people. But before any of that happens, before the wilderness sojourn comes to an end, and before Moses breathes his last and dies, Moses calls the people of God together once again.

So listen now for a Word from God from Deuteronomy 5:1-21 and 6:4-9.

5:1 Moses convened all Israel, and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. 2 The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. 3 Not with our ancestors did the Lord

make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. 4 The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire. 5 (At that time I was standing between the Lord and you to declare to you the words of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said: 6 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 7 you shall have no other gods before me. 8 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 9 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, 10 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. 11 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. 12 Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 14 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. 15 Remember that you were a

slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day. 16 Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. 17 You shall not murder. 18 Neither shall you commit adultery. 19 Neither shall you steal. 20 Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor. 21 Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

6:4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

It's been almost 40 years since God parted the Red Sea and God's people walked through on dry ground. It's been almost 40 years since Moses

ascended the mountain and received the Ten Commandments from God. And during that span of 40 years, an entire generation of God's people has died out, and an entirely new generation has come of age. As the people of God approach the Jordan River, as they prepare to return to the Land of Promise, only Moses has a living memory of Egypt.

The people of God are approaching a boundary marker. What lies ahead will be different than what has come to pass. As they enter the Land of Promise, they will bump into neighbors who have different ideas about religion, about what is right and wrong, about the ultimate meaning of things.

And so as they're standing on the edge of the Land of Promise, Moses calls the whole people together once again. And he says, "Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today."

Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.

All of us here alive today.

The thing is, the people whom Moses is addressing weren't even born when God gave the law at Mount Sinai. Moses knows that. The people know that.

What Moses is saying, or perhaps, more accurately, what God is saying to us through the Scriptures, is that this covenant isn't just for that

small group of people who came out of Egypt all those years ago. This isn't ancient history, just a neat little story. This covenant that God gave at Sinai stretches across thousands of years and thousands of miles to right into this very room, to you and me, we who live and move and have our being in Athens, Georgia, in 2019. This covenant is not just with our ancestors. It extends to us, all of us, here alive today.

IV

Perhaps you are standing at a boundary marker of sorts today. Perhaps you're facing a change in your job, or in a key relationship. Perhaps you're facing some changes in your health or financial status, or both. Perhaps you are aware that your future might look very different from your past.

Perhaps you are trying to navigate your way through a complex issue. Perhaps you know the general direction you want to go. Perhaps you've identified your ultimate objective, but as you've set off, relying on your internal compass and gut instincts, perhaps you're getting the feeling that something just isn't quite right.

I wonder if you'll trust me with a little experiment this morning. Close your eyes and keep them closed for a few moments. Now, without looking, just relying on your feelings, on your gut instincts, point due north. Keep

pointing, and now open your eyes and take a look around.¹

Somebody is lost. Most of you pointed right here at the pulpit. But you're actually off course by 15 degrees. Due north is right through there. It may not matter when you get to the parking lot, but by the time you get to the Canadian border, you'll be a few hundred miles off course.

My friend, there is a Truth that exists independently of your feelings. There is a Truth that is independent of your instincts and theories. And to the extent that you are not lined up with the Truth, you are what is known as lost.

Moses implores the people of God to remember the Truth, to remember God's law. To write it on their hands, to bind it on their foreheads. To talk about it with their children when they're at home and far away. To keep checking their bearings against something other than their own instincts.

Because it's all too easy to get lost in this great big world. And so my friend, God gave you God's law, not as a burden, not as a "follow this or else," but as a gift. As a way to test and verify your instincts. As a way to point you toward due north. As a way to navigate through a darkened night.

V

With each passing day, with each new headline, with each new Tweet, it

¹ I am grateful to Dave Ramsey for introducing me to this illustration in the introduction video for *Financial Peace University*.

seems like the world in which we live becomes more and more lost. Up becomes down, left becomes right, everyone seems to have a hot take and a short fuse.

The world needs us, friends, the world needs you and me, to remind them that there is a fixed point in the universe, a point in the universe at which we can take our bearings, a place to test our feelings and instincts.

That fixed point is named Jesus of Nazareth, whom we call the Christ. He is the living embodiment of God's law. He is the way, and the truth, and the life. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the light of the world.

One day, someone asked Jesus a question about which of these commandments was the greatest. And Jesus quoted this passage from Deuteronomy. Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

So take one finger and point it toward heaven. The first commandment is to love God. Now take a finger from the other hand and point it at a neighbor. The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Now put those two fingers together.

Perfect love of God. Perfect love of neighbor. Life lived in the shape of the cross. That's how we will always find our way home.

Thanks be to God. Amen.