

Forget Not the Lord's Blessings

Deuteronomy 8:6-20

November 27, 2011

The whole history of God's dealing with us tells the story of His provision for us. God has always taken the initiative to provide what we need and to make certain His people are cared for. He created the Garden of Eden with all that was required for life and then placed Adam and Eve in it. It was only after they spurned this gift and rebelled against such a generous God that God removed them from the garden and made their work difficult. From that time on God worked steadily and with great focus to undo the damage that Adam and Eve had done, all while making clear the extent of that damage and that it was only He who could repair it.

Deuteronomy comes to us as part of that process. Moses has led the people through the wilderness and they stand on the edge of the land God promised would be inhabited by the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For the last 40 years Moses had been teaching them God's law and how to live under it. He had reviewed with them God's promises to their forefathers. He reminded them of the mighty deeds God did in bringing them out of Egypt. They understood the land was to be theirs, but they still had much to learn and to undergo before it could be, and much to change if they were to keep it. Over the 40 years it took them to get there they had shown themselves to be selfish and lacking in faith in God. Now, as they are about to receive the promise, Moses offered a series of sermons to help them move into the land on the right footing and

with the continued blessing of God. This morning's passage is part of one of those sermons.

As Moses began he reminded them of what he had been saying for 40 years. "*Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land . . .*" (vv.6,7) Moses went on to describe some of the ways in which the land was good. Again, as so many times before, God was providing for them all that they needed. He was blessing them with a fruitful and good land to call their own. The current inhabitants had completely rejected God and His ways and because of the depth and depravity of their sin He was going to remove them from the land and give it to His people.

God's only requirement of His people was that they obey the law He had given them. Obedience meant two things. They must **walk** in God's ways. That is, they must do the things God said to do and not do the things He said not to do. They must be obedient. They must also **revere** God. That is, they must remember God and Who and What God is. He is not like us. He is completely different. He is holy. He created us. He sustains us. He provides for us. The very air we breathe is the result of His creative and sustaining work.

God is gracious and loving, but we must never presume on that love and grace by just assuming it is ours. God provides, but He does not have to. God gives us good gifts, but we do not deserve them and there is no requirement that He continue to be generous with us. Indeed, the day will come when He will stop blessing the world in general and His wrath will be poured out.

Moses made clear to the people that they would be in the land. It was what would happen next that concerned him. He was not worried that God would not keep His promise. God can and does fulfill all He says He will do. Something else gnawed at Moses' heart. *"When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day."* (vv.10,11) Moses was concerned that the people would move into the land and forget God. He had a preventive for it. The way Moses said they were to keep from forgetting God was to **praise** Him.

We must always remember to praise God. This last week most of us sat around tables with family and friends and we stuffed ourselves with food in our annual meal of thanksgiving. As my family sat around the table we shared the things for which we are thankful. Family, jobs, food, time together—all of these things and more were mentioned over the course of those minutes. One theme that was raised time and again was God's provision for our daily lives and His gift of salvation. We must always praise God for His gifts to us, or we will be tempted to forget them. When we have eaten and are satisfied we must always remember to praise God and thank Him for His wonderful gifts to us.

The flip side of praising God is forgetting Him. We must not **forget** God or neglect what He calls us to do. We must be obedient to the One who has given us so much. Moses pointed out what happens next if we forget to obey God and praise Him for His mercy and blessings.

"Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (vv.12-14) God was getting ready to give His people fine houses, large flocks and herds, silver and gold, and more of everything they already had. When that happened, Moses warned, they needed to guard against pride. Their parents had been slaves. Their grandparents had been slaves. Their great-grandparents had been slaves. God brought their parents out of Egypt and led them their whole lives through the desert. They had never known life without the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. They had never known a time when they couldn't get out of their tent in the morning and pick manna off the ground and collect quail for dinner. God had provided for them in incredible ways.

Yet, we and they are just alike. As soon as we get comfortable we have a tendency to forget to be grateful to the source of that comfort. We actually complain that we do not have enough space to store all of our stuff instead of being grateful for the things we have and even giving some of it away to those who need it. We are proud of heart and we forget to be **humble**.

Moses knew it. He saw it in the people around him, and he warned them of a sin I have seen in the church. God has provided for us, but we continue with the illusion of self-sufficiency. Look again at verses 17 and 18. Did you catch them the first time through? *"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of*

my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today." How quick we are to point to our accomplishments as if we had no reason to thank God! Even in the church we can become so proud of what God has worked in us that we forget it is His work and we begin to take credit. We must work hard to provide for ourselves and our families, but even then we must remember the ability to work and a job to do are gifts from God for which we ought to be thankful. We must be wise in our work and the management of our money, but we must never forget that all we have is a gift from God. Commentator Christopher Wright points out that God's sufficient provision leads to praise, but when there is **surplus** the result is pride. When God gives us just what we need, we remember to praise Him. When our coffers overflow we pat ourselves on the back.

This is a big problem in the United States. We compare ourselves to where we were and to our parents. We compare ourselves to each other. We look at the fact that as the economy slides we cannot buy the things we used to be able to buy. Salaries are going up slowly or staying the same, while prices continue to increase. Yet many of the people who complain the loudest about the failing economy do so from their portable computers through their high-speed internet connections.

This has been one of the most intriguing aspects of the Occupy Wall Street movement. People with college degrees are complaining that their tuition is too high, even though they insisted on going to the best schools

and agreed to the tuition before going to class. Others have, or even leave, good jobs, but complain that they are not being paid what those in higher positions are being paid. They say that the government had no business bailing out the banks and big industry, but they insist the government bail them out. There may be some legitimate concerns here and things that need to be addressed, if not by government, then by society as a whole.

Yet these people seem to forget they live in the nation with the greatest freedom and opportunity on the planet. The United States is far from perfect, but simply speaking the words they have used in crying out against the government would have gotten them in trouble and arrested in many countries around the world. The fact that most of the encampments were allowed to remain intact for nearly two months even though there were illegal, either being trespassing on private property, or a misuse of public property, shows the grace and mercy God has shared with us through the culture of the United States. The 99% in the United States is still part of the 1% globally. Instead of looking at the few ultra-rich people and demanding what they have, we would be better served to look at the starving people around the world who have no shelter, no food, no adequate clothing, and nobody to help them, and then thank God for this nation and His blessing to us. The worst off in this nation are still far better off than most of the 7 billion people on the planet. In addition, there is more help here for people who need it than just about anywhere else on the planet, and the United States provides the more opportunities to do well financially

than any other nation on the earth. There are more people getting richer here than anywhere else. Our system is not perfect, but it is the best one yet.

I do not say these things to generate worship of our society or our financial system. Far from it. I say these things to point out how we can forget to be thankful in the midst of the greatest material blessing from God any nation has yet received. We proudly claim that we are responsible for all our success and then we demand to be recognized and given more of the pie when we should fall to our knees and thank God for His incredible generosity to us. All of it, every blessing, every job, every day we can work, is a blessing from God to be cherished and for which we ought to be thankful.

Look what Moses said would happen if the Israelites forgot to thank God and praise Him. *“If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.”* (vv.19,20) If we neglect to thank God for His blessings then they will be removed and given to someone else. If we worship ourselves and our strength, the United States, money, if anything is more important to us than God and being obedient to Him, then we will see how bad things can get. We need to be humble. We need to be thankful. We need to give praise to God who has been so generous with us.

This seems to be an odd sermon for the first Sunday of Advent. After all, aren't we supposed to be

getting ready for Christmas? Well, we are supposed to be getting ready for Jesus' coming. The first time He came in a manger. As the church looks back at that time of expectant waiting, we are reminded we now expectantly await His return. Jesus is coming again. Make no mistake about it.

We are still expected to be obedient to His call, though that call is now to repent and believe the gospel. Jesus proclaimed, *“The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”* (Mark 1:15) We are to be obedient, and that obedience starts with bowing our hearts before God and turning from the evil things we do. It is lived out as we live lives worthy of the sons and daughters of the Most High God. We must be thankful for the salvation brought by the baby in the manger. We must be thankful for the blessings God gives us each day that put food on our table, roofs over our heads, and clothes on our bodies. We must be thankful that our Savior and Lord is coming back to claim His own and we must live ready for that day, keeping watch and remembering the Lord's blessings.