

Written Copy: Deuteronomy 8:6-10 “Gratitude or Entitlement”

Thanksgiving Eve Worship
Wednesday, November 24th, 2021

Text: Deuteronomy 8:6-10

⁶ So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, ⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹ a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. ¹⁰ And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

The text’s intent

As Israel prepares to receive God’s gift of the Promised Land the LORD through His prophet Moses prepares their hearts and minds to receive this gift with the right attitude, one of gratefulness and thanksgiving that honors God as the gracious giver and provider of all things. He reminds them of His provision during their years of wilderness wanderings where they didn’t always get what they wanted, but always had what they needed. He did this in a manner that tested them in order to show them the ungratefulness and entitlement that they had in their hearts and worked as a loving father teaches and disciplines his children to have a right attitude about life. The LORD wanted them to know that who they were is not defined by the quantity or quality of the gifts they receive, but by who they belonged to, by the grace and mercy of their loving and redeeming LORD God.

Focus Statement:

Although we are undeserving and not entitled to it, the Lord has blessed us with the gift of a great land to live in. He has protected us from our enemies. And He works to remove the ungratefulness and entitlement from our hearts by His gift of Law and Gospel. He continues to give us not what we earn or deserve, but the greatest gift of grace in the salvation accomplished for all men by His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

Like Israel we can develop ungrateful hearts filled with entitlement when we see the world with all it’s problems. Although we live in a land that is like the Promised Land we are very superficial in our giving thanks, instead spending more time complaining about the wrong things, and neglecting to thank and praise our God daily for His blessings upon us

What the hearer should do as a result:

Spend some time tonight or tomorrow and do as the LORD asked Israel: consider all the gracious gifts He has blessed you with. Consider the greatness of His gift of faith in Jesus Christ, how that helps us in our struggles with life now, and makes sure we receive the eternal promised land to come.

Subject Sentence: The LORD desires us to be grateful for His gifts of love

Introduction: Blessings Bring Entitlement and Ingratitude

If there was a meme that sums up our life lived out with COVID-19 and it's aftermath maybe it would be this one: *{show picture of a roll of toilet paper with the caption "You never appreciate what you have until its gone, like toilet paper for example."}* Now we seem to have solved the supply and demand problem on this particular item for now, and for that we should all be grateful. Another thing to be grateful for is the reopening of sit-down restaurants. Remember what it was like when COVID was first in full swing, and we couldn't go in and sit down to enjoy a freshly made warm dinner? Carry outs were somewhat OK, but I found they were not quite the same. I am very thankful that we can return to sit down dining again.

But in some ways things have yet to return to what they once were. Take for example fast food. Remember before COVID when you could drive through your favorite fast-food joint and it would be open, even well into the wee hours of the morning? When COVID was in full swing many of the local fast-food joints closed by 7 or 8 PM, even on Friday or Saturday nights. Later hours have begun to return, but they are still not like they used to be. And even when they are open, often the "fast" aspect leaves a lot to be desired. This is true even in the sit-down restaurants. Signs posted in many of these establishments inform us of the reason, which is a valid one: there are not enough employees returning to work to staff the place adequately. We know this, yet this knowledge doesn't always affect us as it should. People still complain about the lack of efficient service. Many restaurants have resorted to posting signs along the lines of this one *{show picture of a lady hanging a sign in a restaurant window that says "Short staffed. It's the new pandemic. PLEASE be kind to our wait staff."}*. Some others add on the thought: "**don't take your frustration out on the ones who did show up for work**". We shouldn't need to be told that, yet sometimes we need to be told that. Why is that? We've grown accustomed to a certain level of service. We expect it every time. And when we don't get it, we turn angry, impatient, and indignant.

Now maybe that's not you. Maybe you have the patience of a saint. But what is your attitude when you watch the Evening News and see all the trouble, strife, rioting and looting, that is going on around you. How greatly do these things trouble you? How much do you worry that things are falling apart at the seams and spinning out of control? We have been through similar times of trouble and strife before. Think back on the 1960's with the protests over Vietnam, the race riots, the women's liberation movement, and the worry over the possibility of a nuclear holocaust. Think back to what things were like in the county in World War II for those who lived through it or watch documentaries about it. People then as now in their worrying lost sight of the fact that God promises He's in control. In our eyes the world is not running in the manner we've grown accustomed and entitled to and we don't like it. We have all grown accustomed to a period of relative prosperity, peace, and growth. We've grown so accustomed to it that we've developed a sense of entitlement. We believe that we are entitled to live in a country where these problems are easily and quickly handled, and that they won't affect us personally.

Now we all know as Christians we are supposed to be thankful for all God's gracious gifts. This message is repeated in some way, shape, or form every Sunday. In fact, I was told by someone recently that *"to have a special Thanksgiving Eve service was a waste of time. People have better things to do the day before Thanksgiving. And besides that, as Christians we are all thankful enough"*. Is that really true? In light of the entitlement many of us see in our own hearts with the way the world is today, is that really true? It seems to be a sad fact that the abundance of God's gracious gifts to us can work a sense of ingratitude and entitlement in our hearts.

Warning Israel and Us About Entitlement and Ingratitude

Deuteronomy 8:1-2 ¹"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. ² And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

In our Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy the LORD through His prophet Moses is warning the people of Israel not to develop a heart filled with Entitlement and Ingratitude. And with good reason, they had a track record for falling into this sin. During their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness they time and again cried out and complained to the LORD because things were not going to their liking, things were not the way they wanted them to be. Water didn't always magically appear where they camped. There were no fast-food joints on the route from Egypt to the Promised Land. Yet God did provide them what they needed when they needed it. But this didn't satisfy them because they thought they were entitled to so much more, entitled to all the desires of their heart.

What was the problem with Israel? They forgot who God was and what He had done. They forgot how bad their time of slavery was in Egypt, and how God with a mighty hand and outstretched arm save them, proving to all that He is the One and Only God. They forgot that He did this not because they earned it, but because He loved them and promised long ago that He would accomplish this at just the right time. They forgot that they had to wander in the desert for 40 years because they refused God's command to take the Promised Land from Mt. Sinai, where He promised He would fight for them and deliver all the people over into their hands. And so, they had to wander until that generation died in the wilderness wanderings. This wandering became a time of testing and disciplining the LORD's people desperately needed, as they were prone to wander, prone to develop hearts of ingratitude and entitlement.

Deuteronomy 8:3-5 ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.

The LORD wanted to prepare the following generation for entering the Promised Land. He spent 40 years teaching them about sinfulness of entitlement and ingratitude. He taught them that who they are, and the value of their existence, is not based on the quantity or quality of what they hold in their hands. Instead it comes from who they belong to. They are to define themselves as God's precious children, chosen by Him, graciously loved and blessed by Him, for no other reason than He chose them and loved them.

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This land would be a wonderful land, especially compared to their years of wilderness wandering. And the LORD knew that given enough time the Israelites in this new land would grow complacent, would forget that this land too was a blessing and gift of grace by their God. They would forget that in the wilderness they did nothing to earn this gift, while doing everything to disqualify themselves from receiving it. They would get used to the blessings, they would develop a sense that all the great things in this land like the abundance of food, fresh water, and minerals they were entitled to. When any of these things were not available in the abundance that they became used to and felt they were entitled to, when God temporarily held them back, they would be overcome with an ungrateful heart, and turn away from Him. Moses was right to warn them of these things. Because as time went by that is exactly what would happen to the nation of Israel. They grew in entitlement, ungratefulness, and then turned away from the merciful and gracious God who had blessed them so richly.

Did you ever stop to think how closely we sometimes resemble Old Testament Israel? How perhaps God has used the Pandemic to teach us that we too have a sense of entitlement in our hearts and minds that has no place in the life of a Christian. How we have become entitled in our thinking that this country should more resemble the perfect place on earth that we yearn for instead of a nation existing in a fallen sinful world; a world filled with problems, and troubles, and imperfection, and sin. We want this to be the perfection of the eternal life to come, but it can never be. Our entitlement causes ingratitude in our hearts that, left unchecked, could seriously affect our relationship with our God.

God's Greatest Gift To Be Eternally Grateful For

Thanks be to God that His gracious giving is not based on the level of gratitude in your heart or mine. Israel didn't deserve to be called His children, and neither do you or I. But God so loved the world, so loved you, that He sent His only Son, in order that you could be forgiven of all that would prevent you from receiving His gracious gifts. Jesus came because we could never on our own fight off these sinful feelings of entitlement, we could never remove the ingratitude from our heart, we could never overcome the dissatisfaction that comes when things don't go our way. Jesus suffered in our place for these sinful attitudes. And He gives to us the credit for His life which was always lived in grateful thanksgiving to the Father.

And Christ gives that gift to us over and over again in abundance through the means of grace. He even gives to us the ability to have and hold this wonderful gift, the gift of faith. No matter how dissatisfied you are with your life now, no matter how much you believe you are entitled to, the gracious gift of faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ cancels all your sinfulness. It makes you no longer an entitled ingrateful temper-tantrum prone child, but a much loved, greatly forgiven, restored, and washed clean child of the Heavenly Father. It daily gives to you a new life, one that is full of thankfulness and praise for all our Savior has done. And that is a gift that, rightly seen, can't help but generate thankfulness and praise in your life and mine.

Conclusion: Worship Kills Entitlement and Grows Gratitude

Like Israel we are prone to fall into entitlement and ingratitude. And like Israel we all need a refresher in how gracious our God is, and how wonderful are His gifts to us. And that is what tonight is about. When you walk out of here, you will walk out into the same world, with all the same problems. But I pray you will walk out with new eyes to see it through. I pray that you walk out leaving behind the ingratitude and entitlement over all you think you should have but do not, and what you think your life should be but is not. And instead that you leave here with a new appreciation for all the gracious gifts that you have been given by your loving Father. I pray that tomorrow, you will from the heart, give thanks for His gifts to you of home, food, family, health, and safety among others. But most especially that you would, every single day, give heartfelt thanks and praise to God for all you have received and continue to receive through your faith in Jesus Christ. And that you will always be looking forward to the most gracious gift to come, our Promised Land of eternal life. All that being said, I hope you agree with me that it's been a worthwhile time gathered here in the Lord's presence, to praise Him and thank Him yet again for all His gracious gifts to us. Amen.