

Thank and Obey  
Deuteronomy 8

Turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 8, please. This is Thanksgiving weekend, and we have it this time of year to celebrate that different crops that have grown this summer and have been harvested. Some were harvested almost two months ago, and a bit is still being harvested, but on the whole that's the idea.

I'm told that the three major feasts in the Old Testament were all basically thanksgiving feasts: Unleavened Bread connected to the barley harvest, Feast of Pentecost at the wheat harvest, and Feast of Tabernacles/Shelters when grapes were ripe.

The OT actually had three different thanksgivings, the first early barley harvest, which ripened faster, which included the 7 day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:10-14; Ruth); the second was the beginning of the wheat harvest, the Feast of Pentecost 50 days later, called Feast of Harvest, Feast of Weeks, or just Firstfruits (Ex 23:16; Lev 23:15-16; Deut 16:10; Num 28:26). The third was at the end of harvest, and connected to the grape harvest, the Feast of Tabernacles/Shelters (Lev 23:34-44).

Thanksgiving is not a religious holiday in Canada, but it is a thoroughly biblical and God-honouring kind of celebration. For a child of God, Thanksgiving is more important than Christmas. The Bible knows nothing about celebrating the birth of Christ every year, but the OT scheduled the three main religious holidays around food harvests.

Deuteronomy 8 ties thanking God for food and clothing to something else. For Moses, *thanking God for taking care of us* is bound up with *living in his ways*. Let's put bluntly: if we stop thanking God for taking care of us, then we will stop obeying him, and then we will lose out on what he has promised us. If we don't want that, then praise God, thank God for his care.

Dt 8:10-11 *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. <sup>11</sup> Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands.*

These 3 go together: (1) praise him, (2) don't forget him, (3) don't stop living in his ways.

This sermon is a kind of warning. I did not start out to warn. I picked Deuteronomy 8 because I knew it speaks about God providing for us, and God providing seemed a good thing on Thanksgiving Sunday. But reading it over and over this week, I saw what Moses was saying in a way I had not seen before. I found a warning, so that's what we will consider today.

V1 – Let's live in God's ways, so we'll receive what he promised. *Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.*

We also are promised a place, but our place is not Canada. Canada is not our home. The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 “were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God (and ours), for he has prepared a city for them (and for us).”

But Hebrews warns believers just like Moses does: live in God’s ways, so you will receive what God has promised.

Vv2-5 Remember how God took care of you in hard times. <sup>2</sup> Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. <sup>3</sup> He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. <sup>4</sup> Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

Remember God’s care in our hard times. Israel had 40 years of hard times. We have hard times to humble us and test us. Hard times show what’s in our hearts, if we actually mean to follow God or not. Hard times, when we feel we’re barely surviving, sure do that.

In hard times God is trying to teach us that we are completely dependent on him. He humbles us, causing us to hunger, then feeding us, to teach us that we get food from him just as surely as God fed Israel with manna.

*Your clothes did not wear out, and your feet did not swell.* When we just barely have enough to survive, we tend to think that God is not paying attention at all. Totally wrong. God is paying very close attention. He knows when our clothes are wearing out, he knows exactly what’s happening in our chequing account and with our other bills.

In hard times, we are surviving because God is making sure we are surviving, that we’ve enough to continue on. When hard times are over, it’s very important to remember that.

Vv6-9 – So live in God’s ways, because it will get better. <sup>6</sup> Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. <sup>7</sup> For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; <sup>8</sup> a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; <sup>9</sup> a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

In Deuteronomy 8, times when we don’t have enough, and good times when we have plenty, are not reward or punishment. The hard times are not punishment, instead they are teaching times, when God watches closely and humbles us and trains us to trust him.

What we need to see here is that in v1, Moses called us to live in God's ways, so we would receive what he's promised. Then Moses talked about God's care during their hard times, and then in v6 he comes back to living in God's ways: *observe the instructions of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him, and honouring him.*

All the way through this chapter, Moses goes back and forth between urging us to live in God's ways, and urging us to remember how God takes care of us. These two are tied together. Deut 8:10-11, the middle of our chapter, tell us this again:

Vv10-11 When things go well, praise the Lord your God. Otherwise you'll forget him and not live in his ways. <sup>10</sup> *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.* <sup>11</sup> *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.*

When things go well, let's praise him for what he's given us. If we want to live in obedience to God, which we do, this praise is not optional, it is essential.

The Bible is clear that God feeds and waters all his creation. Every plant that drinks water gets its water from God. Every animal that eats gets its food from God. All humans get their food from God. And you will say, but some animals and people don't have enough food. And that is certainly true.

Ps 104:27 *All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time.*

<sup>28</sup> *When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.* <sup>29</sup> *When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.*

Why does God hide his face and cut off life? I cannot answer that. What we do all know is that when food comes, we got it from God, when we have clothing and shelter, God made it available to us. This is so for every human on earth.

We don't praise God for this because he's upset if we don't. There is none of that in Deuteronomy 8. Moses is worried, but not that God will be offended if we don't thank him. Moses is worried that if we don't praise him, we'll forget him, and no longer live in his ways.

We all have troubles that we pray about, some of them intense. But if our food and water were cut off by the end of this church service, we would quickly be more concerned about that than we are about those other troubles.

We don't think about food and water because God has been so generous and so utterly faithful to us. Is it not true that the more reliable God is, the less it occurs to us to thank and praise him for our food and water? That, my brothers and sisters, is exactly what Moses feared. What should God do with us? We have put in him an awkward place.

Vv12-14 If we don't praise God, we'll will forget him and become proud in times of plenty, we'll forget his care in the hard times.

*<sup>12</sup> [If you don't praise God for his care], when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> 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.*

God does not like to give people hard times. He does it to humble us and teach us that everything comes from him, we depend on him for survival. Praising God for his care (v10), and hearts becoming proud (v14), are the opposites. One will happen, or the other.

Vv. 15-16 God made clear in the hard times that he was taking care of us, our survival was in his hands. *<sup>15</sup> He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. <sup>16</sup> He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.*

Moses reminds them again about their hard times. “that vast and dreadful wilderness.” The KJV has “that great and terrible wilderness,” which is a totally wonderful line, I don't know why any translators think they can do better.

Moses preached these things right at the end of the 40 years in the wilderness. The people in front of him don't know anything else, but Moses does, and to Moses that wilderness is a horrible place, this great and terrible wilderness. “God led you through this great and terrible wilderness.” You got water out of a rock, and manna from heaven, to humble us and test us, so that in the end it might go well with us. THAT is the reason for hard times.

Vv. 17-18 How we talk to ourselves about our successes. *You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” <sup>18</sup> 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 ancestors, as it is today.*

Moses says, *You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”* It is too late for “you may say to yourself.” We do regularly say these things to ourselves. My ability and my endurance have produced this wealth for me. And we forget the Lord our God, who gives us the ability to produce wealth.

And we say, “I made a few sensible choices and I worked hard; if this other person had done the same they'd be as well off as I am.” And Moses would say, “Why can you make sensible choices, and this other person cannot? Who gave you that? Why can you work with stamina, and discipline, and the other person cannot? Who gave you that?”

God gave you that, and he does not give it to everyone, says Moses. Remember to praise God, because you got that from God, and it could end today.

We are right that our sensible choices and our stamina can produce plenty for us. But where do we get good choices and endurance? From God, as directly as the water from the rock, and the manna from heaven. Why do we live in a place where good choices and stamina even matter? Many places is doesn't matter. That's not our doing either. We are either proud, or we praise.

This whole chapter is Moses' fear that God's people will say, "my abilities and my stamina have produced this success," because Moses knows that if we think like this, we will stop living in God's ways, and then we'll lose what God promised us.

Remember. Verse 2 begins with "*remember*," *remember* how God cared for you in your hard times. V18 also begins with *remember*, *remember* the Lord your God, who gives you the ability to produce for yourself.

Vv19-20 Final warning: Keep living in God's ways *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. <sup>20</sup> Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God.*

Faith in God has died in people, it has died in people who were a part of this church, it had died in churches, it has died in cities, even countries. In this Scripture, the strongest protection against leaving God is to remember God's care for us in the hard times, and to thank God for his kindness in the good times.

When I was young, one of the marks of a Christian was that at a restaurant, Christians bowed their heads and put their hands together and thanked God for their food. For a teenage that was so awkward, and I rarely did it. Not that I ate in a restaurant very often.

In front of the non-believers I was embarrassed to pray, and in front of believers I was embarrassed to not pray. No nice way out of that.

In these days that mark of a Christian is not as strong as it once was. But always thanking God for food is a profound act, and one of the best things that Christians could be known for in this world would be as those who always thanked God for their food.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, it began like this: *Taking the five loaves and two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves* (Mk 6). Here's the Lord's Supper: *For I received from the Lord what I passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it* (1 Cor 11).

On that first day of the week, when Jesus rose from the dead, he was walking with two disciples who did not recognize him. They all stopped to eat. Luke writes: *When Jesus was at table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him* (Lk 24).

Everyone human who has food and clothing and shelter available to them, has it because God made it available. The difference between God's people and the rest is not that God gives us more. The sun and the rain are for everyone. The difference: we who are God's people know where we get these things, and thank God, and praise God, rather than having proud hearts.

We thank God for food and clothing and shelter, and we obey him, live in his ways, so that in the end it will go well with us, and we will receive what God has promised through Christ. Amen.