

# REMEMBER THE LORD'S SALVATION

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Thanksgiving Eve

November 25, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The Old Testament lesson for Thanksgiving comes from the Fifth Book of Moses, also known as Deuteronomy, chapter 8, verses 1 through 10. Deuteronomy comes at the end of Israel's forty years of waiting in the desert wilderness. It's basically the last words of Moses to the people of Israel before they enter the land God was giving them. He commands them to remember the ways God had saved and protected them. Please stand as you are able for God's Holy Word. From Deuteronomy 8, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup>“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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. <sup>5</sup>Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. <sup>6</sup>So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. <sup>7</sup>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, <sup>8</sup>a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.”

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Thankfulness is a tricky thing. It's an ironic thing. It seems that the more we have, the harder it is to be thankful. I'm not going to say that rich people are less thankful than poor or middle class people, because that's not always true. It may be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, but with God, all things are possible (Matt. 19:24-26). But the more we have, the harder it is for us to be thankful. Think of this on an individual level, that is, as regards yourself, not the wealthiest one percent. I don't need to tell you that all of us are, materially, quite wealthy compared to the rest of the world, and especially compared to previous generations and eras. You've probably heard it before, and it probably doesn't have much impact on us. The more we have, the harder it is to be thankful. So we don't need to think of the rich people we know to see this. We can just think of ourselves. The more we have, the harder it is to be thankful.

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There are a few reasons for this. For one thing, I just don't have the energy to be thankful for everything I should be thankful for. I'm guessing you don't either. The more we have, the more energy it takes to give thanks for all of it. The task of thanksgiving can become overwhelming.

Let me illustrate this for you. Imagine that everyone in the world thinks you're a really great person. I don't know why. They just do. So every day a hundred people each send you a hundred dollars. That would be pretty great. But here's the catch: in order to maintain the perception that you're a really great person, you have to write personal thank you notes to all of them. That's a hundred thank you notes a day for ten thousand dollars a day. It's a pretty good deal. I pulled out my calculator to see how much that would amount to in one year. It's 3.65 million dollars. My first thought was, *I should not have needed a calculator for this*. My second thought was, *How long would it take until I start begrudging the people sending me money?* Not very long, I don't think. Even just from a transactional perspective, a thank you note for a hundred dollars is a pretty good deal. But you would get tired, and you would quickly get to the point where you don't really need the hundred dollars in the next envelope. With each gift we would become less and less thankful. Eventually we would come to hate the gifts. When we have so much, it's just too much work to be thankful.

Every day, God gives us far more than a hundred envelopes of a hundred dollars. We, of course, do not acknowledge this at all. No amount of money can buy the air we breathe every other second. No amount of money can buy the sun, or the rain, or the blood in our veins. These are all gifts of God's creation, and he gives them to us constantly. Whatever money we do have in our bank accounts, our bodies, our homes, our families, and all of our possessions, they are also gifts from God through Jesus Christ. And I haven't even mentioned anything regarding the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, or eternal salvation. These new creation gifts far surpass the gifts of the old creation. If we even tried to give thanks for all of God's gifts, the task would be overwhelming. We are physically, mentally, and spiritually incapable of thanking God sufficiently. The task is literally impossible. And the more we have, the more impossible it becomes. So that's one reason why the more we have, the harder it is to be thankful.

Another reason is that abundance leads to idolatry. In the book of Proverbs, a wise man (Agur) said,

“Give me neither poverty nor riches;  
feed me with the food that is needful for me,  
lest I be full and deny you and say,  
‘Who is the LORD?’  
or lest I be poor and steal  
and profane the name of my God.” (Prov. 30:8-9).

The problem with abundance is that we start to trust our abundance. That is, we begin to worship our abundance, which is really just worship of ourselves. The more we have, the more we look to what we have. And more and more, we start to think of it as our own. More than that, we even start to think of it as being a part of ourselves. We can't imagine life without it. Our stuff starts to become part of us, part of our identity, and by that point we have clearly ceased to recognize it as a gift. The more we have, the harder it is to be thankful. We have become idolatrous.

Perhaps, in this materialist world, as we have fallen in love with and chased after material things, God's judgment comes in the form of handing us over to our materialism. That may sound weird, so let me explain. God often judges the world by handing us over to the corrupt desires of our hearts (Rom. 3:24, 26, 28). We chase after idols, and God knows these idols will

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fail us, if not in this life, certainly in the next. So he doesn't need to smite us with a bolt of lightning. He can just sit back and let our idols fail us. And it is far better for us if our idols fail us before it becomes too late to repent. The worst thing God can do is let us keep all our idols for our entire earthly lives. It is really a gracious thing if God takes our idols away from us. We're like kids running with scissors. The worst thing a parent can do is let the child be. The best thing a parent can do is take the scissors away and let the kid throw a tantrum.

So if God disciplines us, that is a gracious thing, and we ought to give thanks for it. Whether we receive good from the Lord, or whether we receive something we think to be evil, we should give thanks. Because in all of these things, God is working for our good.

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This is certainly an odd Thanksgiving. We might even say that, compared to other Thanksgivings, it's a bad Thanksgiving. Much has been taken away from us. And I'm not just talking about the day itself. I mean, that's one thing. Many of us will not see any extended family this year. Many will not even see another human being on Thanksgiving. And that's hard. But beyond that, as we look back on the last year, we might see less to be thankful for. Much has been taken away. But consider that God is faithful in the midst of that. Consider that God is probably using this, somehow, to discipline you. And I want you to think of it in terms of the small picture of your life. Because God doesn't just work in the big picture of the entire world. He works in the small picture of your life. He gives to you, and he takes away from you. And he does all of it for your good.

We may not understand how some things are good for us. There are some ways in which God disciplines us that we will not understand until years later. There are other things that we may never understand. The value of discipline does not always depend on us understanding it. The child may not understand why the scissors were taken away, but the discipline was still beneficial. We may not understand why God takes certain things away from us, because, by virtue of him taking it away from us, we never get to see the real danger in it. Faith does not mean that we understand it all, but we do know that God is good to us for Christ's sake.

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I'll give you two examples from the Old Testament. The first is the Israelites in the desert wilderness. This is the Old Testament reading for today. The LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt. They had been slaves there, but God brought them out to give them their own land. But in doing so, he took away the stability of their lives. There wasn't much for food or water in desert. Nor were there houses for them. So the first generation of Israelites who went into the desert grumbled. They considered slavery in Egypt to be better than homelessness, hunger, and thirst in the desert (Ex. 16:3; Num. 14:2). Because of their grumbling, God sentenced them to wander in the wilderness for forty years until that generation died off. It was their children, the next generation that would inherit the new land. These are the ones who spent most of their lives in the wilderness. They grew up with poverty and homelessness. So they learned to trust the LORD far better than their parents did.

The book of Deuteronomy is kind of Moses' farewell sermon before these Israelites go into the new land. And listen to what Moses says to them. Listen to how he explains the hardship they faced in the desert:

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. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know,

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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. (8:2-3)

That last phrase is the key: "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." It's not just that God was teaching them to trust him for their physical needs. But by learning to trust him for their physical needs, they also learned to trust him for their spiritual needs. That is far more important, and that was God's purpose all along.

So when this generation of Israelites came into the new land, those who truly believed, those who learned what God was teaching them, they knew that this land was not the end goal. This land with brooks and fountains and springs, with valleys and hills, with wheat and barley and grapes and figs and pomegranates and olives and honey, this land was not the real blessing God was giving them. By faith they knew to look for a city beyond this world, one who's designer and builder is God (Heb. 11:10). By letting them hunger and thirst, and by feeding them with manna from heaven, God taught them that there is something more important than food. It's the Word of God, because the Word of God imparts to us salvation in Jesus Christ, so that we might inherit the new creation.

In this case of discipline, God eventually told them what the purpose was. He explained it to them through the prophet Moses so that, when they did come into material blessing, they would remember to look beyond it to their imperishable reward.

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My second example for you is Job. And he is a quite different example. When we meet Job he is a very wealthy man. He was also righteous and faithful. The LORD allowed Satan to torment Job for a time, so Job suffered much. First he lost all of his wealth. Then his children died. But Job did not accuse God of injustice. Finally, Satan attacked Job's body with sores. His wife finally got fed up with it all and said, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." (Job 2:9). But Job refused. He said, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). Job recognized that everything he had was a gift to begin with. For it to now be taken away was no injustice, because he really had no claim to it in the first place. Whether he received good or evil, he trusted God to be good and do what is ultimately good for him.

So in the midst of his suffering, he was able to say with confidence,

I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.  
And after my skin has been thus destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I shall see God,  
whom I shall see for myself,  
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.  
My heart faints within me! (Job 19:25-27)

This hope is what sustained Job. Though he was a wealthy man, he had been given the gift of faith to see, not only that his earthly possessions were gifts from God, but also that they paled in comparison to the life to come in the resurrection. Even after his skin is completely destroyed, he will see his God and Redeemer in the flesh. Through eyes of faith he saw beyond the joys and sufferings of this life to the new creation.

We may not be as faithful as Job. We're probably not. Yet, this is the will of God: that we would give thanks in all circumstances. When we receive plenty, give thanks. When that plenty

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is taken away, or even just a portion of it, give thanks, because God is working in all of these things for our ultimate good. And that good is that he, by the Holy Spirit, would guard and preserve and strengthen us in the true faith so that we might inherit Christ's kingdom in the new creation.

We give thanks for the Lord's discipline, because it teaches us not to get caught up with the idols of this life that would distract us from the greatest gift.

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This Thanksgiving, give thanks for the material gifts you have. Give thanks for whatever family or friends you have. Give thanks for the Lord's discipline, even when he takes some of his gifts away, because this discipline makes us look to the imperishable gift that will never fade away. Nor will it ever fail.

Remember Christ's salvation. On the cross he bore the condemnation for all our sins. And that includes, of course, our ingratitude. Imagine that. Marvel at that. God's ultimate solution for our ingratitude is to die for it. Yes, he disciplines us, but that is simply to make us see his ultimate and eternal solution. Jesus deals with our ingratitude by bearing it in his body so that on that dark Friday afternoon, God looked down and saw in Jesus an ungrateful Son. The Father saw Jesus as an ungrateful and rebellious Son. That probably sounds blasphemous, but it's really the radical expression of God's love. Jesus took the form of an ungrateful Son so that when God our Father looks on us he sees the perfect gratitude of Jesus.

Our loving Father disciplines us so that we will remember this salvation and set it as our hope for this life and the next. Finally, the day will come when we will need no more discipline. We look forward to that city whose designer and builder is God. There we will be transformed to live in perfect gratitude and joy forever and ever. We will see perfectly every good thing God has done for us. It will be a joy to give thanks. And we will have all eternity to do it. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.