

He Led Us Through Deuteronomy 8:7-18

Introduction

If only I knew then what I know now, then I would have _____.

That is an interesting conversation starter, one you might use during your Thanksgiving gatherings when the normal table talk begins to dwindle. Over the years sociologists have occasionally posed it to panels of senior adults. The answers they receive haven't varied much over the years.

- I would have worked less and played more.
- I would have listened better to my parents.
- I would have taken better care of myself!

That might be a great conversation starter for the children of Israel in today's text as well. Think about all that has happened to them!

The book of Deuteronomy literally means "the second Law." It is the retelling of the same laws that we read in the book of Exodus. That's where the first Law is. There are 40 years between the first Law and the second Law.

- In between there had been those 40 years of disobedience and wandering in the wilderness as punishment for their disobedience.
- All the people who heard the Law the first time are now dead, with three exceptions: Moses, Joshua and Caleb. Moses will die before this book is over.

Today, they stand on the brink of the Jordan River, ready to cross over to the land God had promised to give them. Think of all that had happened to them in between the two readings. Wow! If only they knew then, what they know now.

- Maybe they would have been quicker to obey.
- Maybe they would have trusted God more and complained less.
- Maybe they would have stayed in Egypt!

Let's fast forward several thousand years to November 26, 2019, the day of our last Thanksgiving Service. You and I are not standing on the shore looking into a Promised Land, but we are standing at the precipice of a new year. This is the final worship service of this church year. The next time we gather together, we will be in Year B! Look at all that has happened to us in those 12 months!

Of all the things we might say in this moment, I hope the one we choose is the phrase we read in Deuteronomy 8:15:

He led us through ... (Deuteronomy 8:15)

God has led us through! Just as certainly as He moved the people of Israel through the 40 years in the wilderness with the pillars of cloud and fire, God has led this congregation and us individually through the unexpected twists and turns of these previous 12 months. It is God who has led us through.

When surrounded by chaos and disorder, we human beings of all generations and all eras of history have a tendency to forget that truth. Moses knows that, so here on the shores of Jordan he challenges his audience to remember that God was the one who led them through. He calls on them to:

... praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. (Deuteronomy 8:10)

That's why we gather tonight. In the midst of COVID concerns and scrambled holiday plans, we gather tonight to praise God for leading us safely to this place and for preparing us to enter into His intended future.

This passage inspires me to a place of praise in a number of ways.

#1: BECAUSE GOD HAS LED ME, I LACK NOTHING

Verses 7-9:

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; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing... (Deuteronomy 8:7-9)

Your mind, like mine, probably went quickly to the 23rd Psalm where David offers the same sentiment a few thousand years later. The traditional wording (KJV) sounds like this:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1, KJV)

Some of the more contemporary versions use this wording:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. (Psalm 23:1, NIV)

The same truth. Because of what God is doing in my life, I don't need a thing. One of the great gospel songs popularized by the Gaithers says this:

*Ev'ry need He is supplying, Plenteous grace He bestows;
Ev'ry day my way gets brighter, The longer I serve Him, The sweeter He grows.
(The Longer I Serve Him)*

That's my testimony today, and something for which I give God praise: I lack nothing. I lack nothing because I am led by a God who supplies my every need. Plenteous grace He bestows.

#2: BECAUSE GOD HAS LED ME, I AM FREE

Verses 11-14:

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. 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. (Deuteronomy 8:11-14)

For the children of Israel, freedom meant, of course, no more bondage in Egypt. For nearly 500 years, they had been slaves, but on this day that was no longer true. Unfortunately for them, they would not live in freedom forever.

The text warns them to faithfully ...

... observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. (Deuteronomy 8:11)

Failure to do so would result in God's judgment and eventually send them into exile as the servants of foreign kings and armies.

The Scriptures make it clear that you and I have been set as well. Our slavery was a spiritual one. We were slaves to sin:

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. (John 8:34)

But because of what Jesus has done on the cross, and because we have yielded our hearts to Him in faith, we are free:

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36)

So this night I am thankful that I have been set free from sin, that Jesus Christ is my Savior, and I have a home in heaven waiting for me someday.

#3: BECAUSE GOD HAS LED ME, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

Verses 15-16:

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. ¹⁶He 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. (Deuteronomy 8:15-16)

That phrase "go well with you" is a statement about God's blessing. Yes, we have come through the vast and dreadful wilderness, experienced snakes and scorpions and so much more. But God uses it all to "humble and test" us.

The result of all of this humbling and testing is that we might experience the blessing of God. That blessing does not come in the form of something economic. It is something that occurs deep inside us. It might be described as a sense of peace or contentment, a settling deep within.

That is, of course, what the hymn writer found when he penned the words to the hymn "It is Well With My Soul." Other Scriptures frame it as our souls finding rest.

In Matthew Jesus says:

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
(Matthew 11:28)*

The Psalmist declares:

My soul finds rest in God alone. (Psalm 62:1)

I loved what one young pastor wrote:

No wonder I am so tired and frustrated and irritable. I am looking for rest in so many other places than God. I look for rest in escape, in opinion, in angry talk – I look for rest in my family – which is beautiful but it's hard to find rest from a 1, 4 and 6 year old – although they can be very encouraging. My soul was meant to find rest in God.

This state of "well" is never dependent on circumstances. No matter what is happening in the world around me, it is well within my. My soul is at rest. And I am filled with thanksgiving for that.

APPLICATION

God's leading is worthy of our praise. There is no doubt in that statement.

But His leading is also a confirmation of God's covenant with us. Look at verse 18:

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. (Deuteronomy 8:18)

God led us through because that is what He has promised to do. He is faithful. Always faithful.

Let us be equally faithful in lifting our praises back to Him.

Amen.