

The Promised Land

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

¹All the commandments which I command you this day you shall keep watch that you do them, so that you shall live and multiply and go in and inherit the land which the LORD swore to our fathers. ²And you shall remember all the ways which the LORD your God brought you these forty years in the wilderness in order to humble you, to test you, to know that which is in your heart whether or not you will keep His commandments. ³And He humbled you and He caused you to become hungry and He fed you the manna which you had not known nor did your fathers know, in order that He would make you know that man does not live on bread alone, but that man lives on all that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

⁴Your garments did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵And you shall know with your heart that as a man chastises his son so the LORD chastises you. ⁶And you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God to walk in His ways and to fear Him. ⁷For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of waters, of fountains and of subterranean water, that flow out in the valleys and the hills. ⁸A land of wheat and barley [bearded grain], and vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey. ⁹A land in which you shall eat bread without scarcity, in which you shall not desire anything more, a land with stones of iron and from its hills you can mine out copper. ¹⁰And you shall eat and be satisfied and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which he gave to you.”

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

After wandering forty years in the wilderness the Israelites have finally come to the Promised Land. A land that is described as a “good” land. The use of the word “good” reminds us of the Creation Week in which everything that the LORD had created was called “good”. This land that the Israelites are about to enter is a land that is near perfection, a land almost as wonderful as Eden itself. This is a land flowing with brooks of water and fountains and filled with bore water. A land covered in wheat and barley ready to be made into bread. A land covered in grape vines ready to be made into wine. A land filled with pomegranate trees and flowing with olive oil and honey. A land filled with iron and copper and bronze. This is a land where no one goes hungry, there will be no lack of bread and no one will ever need to desire more than they have.

Now, we Australians also live in a good land. Our land is flowing with rivers and springs and bore water. Our land abounds in fertile soil fit for growing a variety of crops. Our land is filled with minerals that can be mined out for our benefit. We live in a first world country with medicine, education, and freedoms that most people around the world do not experience. We have luxuries that humanity couldn’t have even dreamed of a hundred years ago. Very few in our country go hungry. Most of us have more than we need, and there is no need for us to desire any more than we already have. We are truly blessed to live in the land of Australia. And like the Israelites we should give thanks to God for giving us this land.

Since God has given us such a good land it is right to give Him thanks and praise. It is right to acknowledge Him as the giver and provider of all things. We should keep His commandments and walk in His ways. We should fear the LORD our God alone. For God has given us His Law not for His benefit, but for our benefit. He has given us His Law to protect us.

When you go bush walking near a cliff you will tend to come across a safety rail and a sign telling you not to climb over the rail. This is put here for your protection, to prevent you from falling off the cliff and hurting or even killing yourself. This is the First Use of God’s Law. God has given us rich blessings and He has also given us Laws to protect us and to use those blessings rightly. Just as any tool can be misused and cause harm, so too the blessings of God can be misused and will lead to our harm.

God had given the Israelites a good land to live in and yet they misused those gifts and disobeyed the LORD their God. They grew fat on the bread and drunk on the wine. They used the gold and silver to build false gods whom they worshipped. The people turned away from God, they followed false gods and lusted after things that they did not need.

Jesus says, “*seek first the Kingdom of God all these things shall be given unto you.*” And Moses said in today’s text, “*man does not live on bread alone, but on all that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.*” For those who seek first the LORD, they will be eat and be satisfied, they will lack nothing, and they will not desire more than they need. For those who humble themselves before the LORD, they will be content with the blessings of God.

But for those who live as one belonging to the world, who seek after the things of this world, who desire to have their own way, they will never be satisfied. They will gorge themselves and yet still be hungry, they will buy whatever they want and yet still not have it all, they will sleep around and yet never be satisfied, they will create a religion and

god in their own image and yet never find comfort, they will run free from the Law and yet be constantly searching for freedom. They turn away from God and His Laws, all to their own detriment.

God promised the Israelites that if they kept His commandments and followed His ways then all would go well for them in the land, but if they disobeyed His Word then they would suffer. And this is the fate for all countries who turn away from the Word of God. They suffer and they collapse. And God does not even need to lift a finger; He simply withdraws His presence and allows the people to destroy themselves. Such as with the Romans, they worshipped false gods and animals and idols, and so the LORD handed them over to their own sinful lusts and allowed the Empire to eventually implode in on itself. And so too will be the fate of Western countries such as Australia and America. If we continue to turn away from the LORD and His Word, the worse our nation will become. If we lust after riches and false gods, if we misuse the resources of this land in the pursuit of our own personal happiness, we will destroy ourselves. And we won't only destroy ourselves physically, but if we seek after the things of this world we will destroy ourselves spiritually.

It is for this reason that God allows temporal punishments to come our way. He allows the temporal consequences of our sins to come and hit us in the face in order to wake us up. Like a father disciplines a disobedient child, so too the LORD disciplines us, not to punish us for our sins, for Christ has already died and taken away those punishments, but to humble us.

We may live in a good Earthly land, just as the Israelites did, but spiritually speaking, we are still in the wilderness. This life on Earth is the wilderness, Heaven is the good land that Christ has promised us. A land of joy and peace, a land of freedom and harmony, where there are no tears, no death, no pain and no sin. A land of absolute satisfaction. For there we will dwell with the LORD and we shall lack nothing, nor shall we desire anything more. This is the Promised Land that awaits us in the life to come.

For now, we wander in the wilderness of this Earthly life. Where there is pain and suffering, there are tears and there is loss. There is sin and consequences, chaos and destruction.

But all of this is to humble us and to turn us to God. Man does not live on bread alone, but from every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. The bread of this world cannot fill us up, but the Bread of Life, which is Jesus and His Body, fills us up forever. The water of this world cannot quench our thirst, but those who drink from the Stream of Life will never go thirsty. The clothing of this life wears away, but the Robes of Righteousness, which Christ clothes us in, never wears out. The things of this world cannot satisfy us, but we can find absolute satisfaction in the LORD. As St. Augustine said, our heart is restless until it finds rest in the LORD (*Confessions*, Book I).

If we trust in the things of this world they will fail us. If we seek after the things of this world we will not find joy. If we walk in the ways of this life they will lead us to destruction.

So God allows our temporal consequences to harm us, in order to humble us, as He humbled the Israelites in the wilderness, so that we may see the futility of the things of this world and turn to Him in repentance and faith. So that we may see that it is God and His Word that gives us all that we need. For we can turn to Him and He will never fail us, we can seek the Kingdom of God and find everlasting joy, we can walk in His ways which lead to a life of peace.

Give thanks to God for all the rich blessings that He has given us in this life! But give thanks even more for the rich blessings of the life to come. Thank God, that even though we may suffer in this life, even though we may face the temporal consequences for our sins, that Jesus has died and arose again so that we will not suffer the eternal consequences for our sins. The wages of sin is death, and all those who sin are deserving of eternal punishment. But out of love for His Creation, God sent His only begotten son to die on the Cross for us.

Christ gave us His Heavenly riches and humbled Himself unto death, even death on the Cross. And now He calls us to give up our Earthly riches and to humble ourselves before Him in repentance and faith; to come to the foot of the Cross, to lay our sins at His feet and to receive the forgiveness of sins. He calls us to enter into the joy of the LORD, to enter into the Promised Land of Heaven.

Come, for Christ has died for you. He was crucified for your sins, and He rose again for your justification. Repent, for your sins are forgiven. Believe, for you are saved. Trust, for God has given you His promise. Receive, for this Land belongs to you. Enter, for this is the Land that God has promised to you.

Give thanks to God, for He has blessed you with the gift of eternal life.

And God does not only promise us the joy of the life to come, but He has promised us that He will be with us in this life, just as He was with the Israelites in the wilderness. We may suffer in this life, we may go hungry or thirsty or naked but this is only temporal suffering. We should not be worried about those things that can harm our bodies, but about those things that can harm our souls.

If we turn to the LORD in humility and let Him take care of us, then nothing can harm our souls. For nothing on Heaven or Earth can separate us from the hand of the LORD. And as we walk through the wilderness of this life and towards the Promised Land of Heaven, God is with us, and God is taking care of us. He is feeding us with the Bread of Heaven, which is the Body and Blood of Christ which comes to in Holy Communion. He clothes us with the white

Robes of Righteousness and He covers our feet with the shoes of the Gospel of peace, and these will never wear out.

And even if we should lose all our food, or drink, or clothing, or anything else, we are always fed by the Word of the LORD. For as Martin Luther said in his famous hymn *A Mighty Fortress*, “though these all be gone...the Kingdom ours remaineth.”

Therefore, give thanks to the LORD for the good land which He has given you. Amen.

And may the LORD bless and keep you until life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYER FOR HARVEST THANKSGIVING

God our Father, You have created the universe in great wisdom, and sustain it by Your powerful word. You are good to everyone, and have compassion on all that You have made. We enter Your house of prayer with thanksgiving, and come before You with songs of joy. We thank You for the many blessings and joys You lavish on our lives. We thank You for soil and seed, sunlight and rain, health and strength, machinery and technology, and every other blessing by which You give us our daily bread. You have given us a plentiful land, rich in resources for agriculture, mining, and industry. You have blessed us with education and skills to use these resources for the good of our country and its people. Although You do not always spare us from trouble and dark days, we still must confess that our cup of blessing is overflowing, and so we praise Your name. Make us continually aware of Your goodness, O Lord. Increase our trust that in all things You are working for our good.

But, Lord, You not only care for our bodies; Your richest love is reserved for the salvation of our souls. Because You have revealed Yourself to us in Your Word, we know You in Your limitless grace, and live in the light of Your truth and love. We thank You especially for Your greatest of gifts: Jesus Christ our Saviour, and for all the blessings of the Gospel and the Church. Help us to appreciate fully these choicest gifts, and to produce in our lives a rich harvest of faith, goodness, and love.

Free us from every temptation to trust in uncertain things like material wealth. Free us from covetousness, envy, and jealousy. Increase our joy in what You provide, and make us content. Make us more sensitive to what others need. Give us compassion to help those who have too little, and the opportunities to share Your blessings. Let our service to others pave the way for witness to the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ Your Son. Teach us to use wisely the things You place at our disposal.

Bless and strengthen the poor and the hungry, those who cannot work, the lonely, the depressed, and especially those who are suffering because of their Christian faith. Give them all the generous help of friends, but, above all, strong trust in Your presence and care.

Guide the nations on earth, and particularly those countries whose people are desperately poor. Grant that all who look up to You for material blessings may find Your kingdom, and Your righteousness. Bless our country Australia with a united spirit and godly goals. Teach its leaders and its people to know, believe, and do Your will. Remove from us things that are unwise and harmful.

Continue to supply the spiritual needs of our families, so that truth, love, and high morals may bless our homes.

We offer You our prayers and our songs of praise, heavenly Father, in the name of Your dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and honour for ever. Amen.