

Sunday November 19 2023

Lesson 12: In Whose House Will You Live?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8: 1-20

**Context:**

Today we continue our fall curriculum, “God Provides.” The third unit is titled “Shelter,” with several lessons focusing on shelter and what physical security means theologically. Today’s lesson is set in the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. The focus of today’s lesson will be to discern how we can accept God’s relentless hospitality.

The book of Deuteronomy is categorized as part of the Torah, the basic body of teaching for life in the Jewish tradition. Much like Leviticus and Numbers, Deuteronomy seeks to help the Israelites as they settle in the land of Canaan with instruction and counsel on applying God’s law for daily living. Chapter eight reinforces the main theme of the book as a basic commandments to seek God’s law for living in a time of prosperity.<sup>1</sup> Much of this counsel and interpretation of the law comes from reflecting on a time when home and place were not yet enjoyed.<sup>2</sup> There is perspective to reminding the people of the hardships of the past to look towards a different future.

A focus of chapter eight and surrounding chapters is a reminder to the people of the danger of arrogance when it comes to daily living. There are three literary units comprising the chapter which are intricately tied together to the related themes of the Lord’s provision and discipline, and Israel’s remembering or not forgetting these times.<sup>3</sup> There are several allusions to drive these points home and help those hearing it understand the point of remembering the Lord’s promises as well as the stewardship God gives them.

To drive home the emphasis on the commandments given to the people by God, the first section reflects on the history of the people. Using the allusion of a father disciplining his son, the same goes for the Israelites and their experience in the wilderness. Yet the father who disciplines the son is still the provider, giving the son resources he needs. God has done the same for the Israelites even in the wilderness providing for them in ways not provided for in their current situation.

The counsel then is to look at the blessing around them. There is so much fertile ground and homes to live in. Verses seven through seventeen paint a beautiful portrait of all God has given them. Yet there is a warning: do not be arrogant and forget God in the prosperity. This is not because of what they have done or achieved; it is a gift from God.

The closing verses give a word of warning. The people are to remember God’s covenant even as they celebrate the prosperity. Yet if they begin to worship other gods and forget God’s

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, Patrick D. “Deuteronomy,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 114.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 115.

voice, they will bring their own destruction. They are called to be thankful and faithful, remembering it is God who has given them so much.

### **Application**

In recent years there has been a focus on hospitality in the Christian tradition as people have sought ways to both welcome people into the church and to discover meaningful ways of connecting to a community. Hospitality has had a long place in the Christian tradition dating back to the early church in both house churches as well as monastic places of retreat and resting centers during Christian pilgrimages. The hospitality given by the church is a modeling and a reflection we find in the gifts of God.

Paired with hospitality is also the understanding of stewardship. Everything we “have,” is not just ours. God is the source of all the things in our life from the land we live on to the food we place on our tables. God has showed us both relentless hospitality in giving us everything we need and then also the gift of stewardship to appreciate and take care of what actually belongs to God.

Yet today’s lesson also comes with a warning. The counsel given to the Israelites is to beware of two things when it comes to receiving this great hospitality from the Lord. One thing is to watch out for the arrogance to having so much, as one forgets who the hospitality comes from and believing everything is ours. The second is to beware of other gods to worship and to abandon God who asks for both thanksgiving and faithfulness.

Perhaps the greatest malady to afflict American Christians is the belief of how we “own” things. We think everything is up to being owned from property to goods to even churches. At the root of nearly every church schism in our country is not the cover issue, like women in ministry or doctrinal beliefs; it is usually tied to something like church property and who gets a say in what is done with said property or buildings. People fight over things and do very unbiblical things like making backroom deals or pursuing lawsuits when they do not get their way, all because they believe something belongs to them. I sure hope before people choose such battles, we remember God’s counsel in Deuteronomy of arrogance and believing things are “ours” when it is God who gave all those things to the body of Christ. All of us can arrogantly believe we own things, including the house of the Lord.

The trickier malady for American Christians to diagnose is the worshipping of other gods. We believe we are too advanced to bow down before images of a bull with horns or a pole with a goddess on the top. Yet my United Methodist professor of polity, retired Bishop Joe Pennel, said we can all be tempted to worship gods, and these are a lot craftier than the gods of old. Bishop Pennel once said he saw just as many Christians who worshipped the gods of wealth, prestige, and image as he did of those who worshipped the Triune God. These gods are a lot more manipulative than Baal or Asherah as they pull at us even as Christians. We put our worth in making more or spending more than focusing on people. Sometimes our decisions as Christians are made more on prestige and popularity instead of what is right. And even for Christians, we can be tempted to be all style and no substance.

I have come to find following Jesus is perhaps one of the most demanding calls because those gods will continue to nag at us. Following Jesus may mean we think of our wealth as a gift to be shared instead of hoarded up into a ball or just for ourselves. Saying yes to God’s call may

mean we are not the most popular even to other Christians who may sneer at us for welcoming or loving others who are strange or different. Emulating Jesus may mean our image is tarnished as we put our identity first in him and shove aside what others think of us.

Part of realizing God's hospitality is an act of submission on our part. God has given so much, and the one thing God asks is we recognize the Lord as the only one we worship. As a result, we are to yield to Jesus seeing "our" property, our time, and our gifts as something which belongs to him. As we accept this hospitality, we are transformed to realize not everything is about us; it is about the Lord God.

How do you understand God's hospitality? Why is it sometime difficult for us to submit and receive things from God? How do we worship other gods? Who are people who radiate God's hospitality in your life? Why do you think God is so relentless in giving to humanity despite our failings?

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