

"You Will Change With Thanksgiving"

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Time passes quickly, and it is already Thanksgiving season. After Thanksgiving, the rest of the year will fly by, bringing about the new year before we know it. In such time, will we be able to welcome the remaining weeks with thanksgiving? With this in mind, we will be looking at the three things to be thankful of, "Thankfulness of what we have been given", "Thankfulness of the things we did not ask for", and "Thankfulness that the Lord is with us".

We will read Deuteronomy 8:1-10. What is written here is the life of the Israelites (the ancestors of the Jewish people today) through the 400 years of enslavement under the Egyptians, and through the 40 years they spent wandering the wilderness, and what God had done for them.

1 "You must obey all the commandments I give you today. If you do, you will not only live, you will multiply and will go in and take over the land promised to your fathers by the Lord. 2 Do you remember how the Lord led you through the wilderness for all those forty years, humbling you and testing you to find out how you would respond, and whether or not you would really obey him? 3 Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to both you and your ancestors. He did it to help you realize that food isn't everything, and that real life comes by obeying every command of God. 4 For all these forty years your clothes haven't grown old, and your feet haven't been blistered or swollen. 5 So you should realize that, as a man punishes his son, the Lord punishes you to help you.

6 "Obey the laws of the Lord your God. Walk in his ways and fear him. 7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land of brooks, pools, gushing springs, valleys, and hills; 8 it is a land of wheat and barley, of grapevines, fig trees, pomegranates, olives, and honey; 9 it is a land where food is plentiful, and nothing is lacking; it is a land where iron is as common as stone, and copper is abundant in the hills. 10 When you have eaten your fill, bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

A few years ago, a survey was given to famous people all around the world and within it was this question: "If you could make one wish come true, what would it be?" There were many answers given to this question, but there was one that grasped the attention of many others. This answer was "To be thankful for all that I have from the bottom of my heart."

It is a very simple answer, needing no explanation. If we could become like this person who had answered in this way, what would our answers be? I believe this person is very smart. This is because this wish could be the truth to fulfilling the things we wish. With this into consideration, we will look at our first point, "Thankfulness of what we have been given".

Thankfulness of what we have been given

Lets read from verse 3~5.

3 Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to both you and your ancestors. He did it to help you realize that food isn't everything, and that real life comes by obeying every command of God. 4 For all these forty years your clothes haven't grown old, and your feet haven't been blistered or swollen. 5 So you should realize that, as a man punishes his son, the Lord punishes you to help you.

It is hard for us to truly imagine what life in the wilderness for 40 years is like. We may not stop to notice very often, but with very little rainfall, San Diego is also a desert wasteland. Only because of the abundant water supply from the Colorado river we are able to plant the many green trees we have. If you would like to see the natural condition of San Diego, all you would have to do is drive east on highway 8. In such barren land, the Israelites lived for 40 years.

As impossible it is for us to find food in the desert, it was for Moses and his people. And so God, who had led them, provided them with Manna, a mysterious food from the sky every single day.

It says in the bible that they made pancakes from it and it tasted like "pancakes fried in oil". (Number 11:8)

4-5 Then the Egyptians who had come with them began to long for the good things of Egypt. This added to the discontent of the people of Israel and they

wept, "Oh, for a few bites of meat! Oh, that we had some of the delicious fish we enjoyed so much in Egypt, and the wonderful cucumbers and melons, leeks, onions, and garlic! 6 But now our strength is gone, and day after day we have to face this manna!" Numbers 11:4-6

God provided them with the necessary manna each day. Because of this it was not necessary for them to plant crops or work hard labor in the fields. It was provided every morning to everyone. It says in the bible that they were given just enough each day, and when they were kept until the next day, they had spoiled. Everything their body needed to survive was replenished by the manna, so they must have been very nutritious. Yet, the people were dissatisfied of it and complained. They had forgotten to be grateful of what they were given without the need of work.

God said to such Israelites. **4 For all these forty years your clothes haven't grown old, and your feet haven't been blistered or swollen.**

In such wasteland of the wilderness, their clothes did not wear, nor their feet blister. This was not 3 months but 40 long years from the day they began their journey to the day they reached their destination. God had watched over them and provided for them.

Once, in an undeveloped country a missionary who had dedicated his life to his work asked his students 3 questions.

Do you have more than a single pair of shoes?

Do you have more than a single set of underwear?

Do you have a choice in what you will eat in one of the three meals you eat in a day?

If your answer is yes to all of these three questions, you are among the top 10 percent of the people who live on this planet.

Has anyone of you been living barefoot all year because you do not have shoes to wear? Anyone of you have to wash your underwear each night to wear again tomorrow? Or have been eating only what has been supplied by others without hope to eat what you wish to eat everyday?

If we can be thankful for all of the things we have each day, we are extremely blessed. When we stop being grateful for the things we are provided of, that is when a dark cloud spreads over our heart, and rain begins to fall.

If we could give thanks from the bottom of our hearts for the things we always have instead of thinking “if only I have this or that” our wishes in life would be almost entirely fulfilled. To our second point. You may be thinking, “huh? is this some mistake?” But it is “Thankfulness of the things we did not ask for”.

Thankfulness of the things we did not ask for

2 Do you remember how the Lord led you through the wilderness for all those forty years, humbling you and testing you to find out how you would respond, and whether or not you would really obey him? 3 Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to both you and your ancestors. He did it to help you realize that food isn't everything, and that real life comes by obeying every command of God.

We have all most likely come across the unexpected, the unwished for. Some of you may be facing such a situation now. The Israelites have faced them as well. They were in “hardships and trials”. But the surprising fact is that God had a certain goal and purpose to these “hardships and trials”. Through the hardships and trials we face, we realize that “man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Yes, the bible tells us that there is something we must know even if it means leaving something behind. And the trails we are faced with are the chances of realizing it. It may be a little strange but if we are going to face some trial anyways, why not get something of value out of it? Let us believe and think of it as paying the price of a trial but there is some change waiting to be accepted.

Many Japanese people go to fortune tellers or spiritual masters when something they do not wish for happens to them. They then pay a large sum to be told stories like “On your shoulders are spirits of your grandparents who are upset because you are not taking care of their graves”. Lets think rationally for a second, there is no way such kind grandparents of yours would be mad for such a thing.

Know the origin of “Fear”. Humans have had fear since the exile from the Garden of Eden as written in Genesis. Today, people use this to cause unrest in our hearts. They use our fear for their own profit. What is the bible’s message of Christmas? Yes, it is “Do not be afraid!” The angel told Mary, the shepherds, and Zechariah, “Do not be afraid!”

There is an account written in the bible of a man blind from birth meeting Jesus. (John 9:1-) **“Master,” his disciples asked him, “why was this man born blind? Was it a result of his own sins or those of his parents?” “Neither,” Jesus answered. “But to demonstrate the power of God.”**

In this way, the words “do not be afraid” or “to demonstrate the power of God” is not just idea I came up with but words of God from the bible. These words are here to be our strength through the many hardships and trials we face. Those who accept these words as words spoken to us personally will gain the peace and strength this world does not offer.

Today, we carry the burden of uncertainty towards the future. With our thoughts on things such as health issues, economic issues, terrorist threats that can happen anywhere at any time, this country, the fate of this world, we are also thinking about what is truly important. All of these problems can plunge us down in despair, but they also have the power to help us realize what is truly most important to us. Rather than being crushed under the weight of these issues, let us acquire a great harvest from them!

It is miraculous for us to be led to realization from our trials. It fulfills the words of the bible. When we meet hardships and trials, we realize that the life we thought was sustained by bread is actually done so by the words of God. It is an opportunity, just as it is written in Deuteronomy.

3 Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to both you and your ancestors. He did it to help you realize that food isn’t everything, and that real life comes by obeying every command of God.

These words still speak to us today. The Lord is speaking to us through our economic difficulty, our marital problems, our parenting problems, in our difficulties caring for our elderly parents, through our health problems, and every other unwished circumstance. God is trying to tell us that we live sustained by the words of God in the bible, not the many things we seek brief comfort in.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are able to see what God wishes most for us through the things we did not ask for. And that is something we must be thankful for. The third point is "Thankfulness that the Lord is with us".

Thankfulness that the Lord is with us

During the 40 years the Israelites spent in the wilderness, there was a backstory. The Israelites likely did not know of this incident. It was something that had happened to their leader, Moses.

When Moses had first received the mission to lead the Israelites from God, he strongly hesitated saying, "**But I'm not the person for a job like that!**" (Exodus 3:11) Certainly, who could lead hundreds of thousands of people to the wilderness? surely anyone would shrink away from such great responsibility. Moses did as well. But God said to Moses, "**I will certainly be with you**" (Exodus 3:12). And during the journey through the wilderness, when Moses was about to lose heart, God said to him, "**I myself will go with you and give you success.**" (Exodus 33:14)

To us, 2017 is an unknown land. No one has ever set foot in it yet. We sometimes worry what path we will walk, but we are forgetting something important. It is who we will be walking that path with.

When my children were young, they would not go to the garage alone even if I told them to. They did not know what could happen in the darkness of the garage. But if I told them, "I will go with you so lets go" they would follow me skipping.

In Psalms 23, David said in his song, "**Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way.**"

We cannot constantly follow each other around. Even more so if it is a path of difficulty or danger. But the words of the bible speak to us saying, "Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me". We can believe in the same God who had been with Moses through the wilderness without fail to be with us through the new year. And we are thankful for this.

Today let us affirm these three things we are thankful for. Are we thankful for the things we have been given? Are we able to offer thanks even in unwished circumstances? Are we thankful that God is with us all the time?

I have conducted and attended many funerals in my life. The individual's photo's were set up in most. No one put up a beloved pet or treasured car or house in its place. The person's best photo's were put up. They all looked as if to say "This is me, the one who had lived in this world".

And as the bible says, each and every one of us is a creation of God. We retake the form that we have been created in, in the image of God. That is what it means to live as God's creation, and to show such life, a photo is placed at the very end of our journey of life. What is essential to living as God's creation is to live thankful of our lives to God.

To live a life fortified by discontent and deficiency is a very sad way of life, and one would continue to do so even until their last years. In contrast, if one lives a life full of thanks and built up on the words of God, they will continue to do so even in their last years. Yes, these things do not become this way just because we are told to. We want to prepare a heart that, under any circumstance, will continue to overflow with thankfulness.

We do not know what 2017 will have in store for us. But if we live by these three things to be thankful of, we can continue our lives with hope and joy through any circumstance.

Lets pray.