

Text: Deuteronomy 8:6-20

Title: “If My People...”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles with me to the book of Deuteronomy ... Deuteronomy 8:6 (page 180 in the pew Bible). The nation of Israel was preparing to enter the Promised Land God had prepared for them after the Exodus from Egypt. A generation of ungrateful, faithless Israelites had to die off before the people of God could move on. (By the way, I hope God doesn't think that about my generation or your generation ... that he's going to have to wait for us to die before He can do the next thing for His people.). So Israel is getting ready to go in. And Moses gathers the people to give them the Law one more time. Earlier Moses had gone up on Mt. Sinai and God gave him the Ten Commandments, and everything else that is known as the Law of Moses. Deuteronomy means “second law.” God repeats His commandments a second time to remind the Israelites of what must be true of their nation as they go in to possess the land of the Canaanites, and develop their new identity as the people of God in the Promised Land.

Now first you will see there is the...

1. COMMAND

Deuteronomy 8:6 - Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him.

Later I will show you from Scripture how this command certainly applies to Israel, as God's covenant people. But it also applies to any nation. All nations will be accountable to God for observing His commands, walking in His ways and honoring Him. All nations, including the United States of America, are accountable to God for His commands.

But it's pretty evident that more and more America doesn't have the national conscience that it once had. Now we normally talk about conscience as something that we have as humans. Our personal conscience tells us the things we ought to do and things we ought not to do. It's the inner voice showing us right and wrong. And as believers, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God play major part in our personal conscience.

But there's also such a thing as a national conscience. In most cultures there are certain things that they will and will not do. There are some “oughts” and some “ought-nots.”

And from the very foundation of our nation, our national conscience was informed by the commands of the Lord. For example: Where did we come up with the conviction that slavery was wrong? For nearly a hundred years slavery existed in our country. But the conscience of the nation was troubled by this (though not all agreed). The Declaration of Independence says: “We hold these truths to be self-evident (like duh!), that all men are created (get that ... created means there's a Creator) equal, that they are endowed by their Creator (not by laws, but by their Creator) with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” So where did this notion come from? It came from the knowledge of God and His commands.

Our founding fathers in the struggle against tyranny from the king of England understood that our rights were not granted by other human beings. They were unalienable rights granted to us by God Himself. We can't take God out of the equation of this land and remain free.

Now not all our founding fathers were Christians or men who took the Bible seriously. But there was an unmistakable conviction that God had guided our nation, we are accountable to Him, and that we must trust Him.

ILLUSTRATION - Abraham Lincoln concluded his Gettysburg Address with the desire that “that this nation, *under God*, shall have a new birth of freedom.” In the 1950s those two words were inserted into our Pledge of Allegiance. The words “In God We Trust” have been on our money since just after the Revolution. In 1956 Congress passed a law, and President Eisenhower signed it into law that our national motto is “In God We Trust.”

ILLUSTRATION – We've come a long way since then. A couple of weeks ago during NBC's coverage of the US Open they showed a clip of a group of children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Strangely when it came to the part that says, “One nation under God,” some editor cut out “under God.” Interesting?

Our national conscience has always been informed by God. The further we distance ourselves from God or the very mention of His name, something else will inform our national conscience.

Now, part of the reason we have moved God out of the national conscience is our relative affluence as a nation. And that was what Moses had in mind when he said...

Deuteronomy 8:7 - For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills;

Deuteronomy 8:8 - a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey;

Deuteronomy 8:9 - a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

Canaan was a beautiful and bountiful land. And so is the USA.

Deuteronomy 8:10 - When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

This is important, because a great temptation when we have become successful is to forget the Lord, to forget to worship and give Him thanks, and to forget that He is the source of our blessings.

And as the people of God we are to be the soul of the nation. We should be the ones who are pushing this in the public discourse. “Hey America, don't forget the Lord.”

So there's the command. Next there is a ...

2. CAUTION

Deuteronomy 8:11 - 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.

The more we have, the less we think we need God. We don't have to trust Him or be accountable to Him. And Moses understood this, and that's why he cautions Israel:

Deuteronomy 8:12 - Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down,

Deuteronomy 8:13 - and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied,

Deuteronomy 8:14 - 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.

You see, affluence often leads to arrogance and independence. When prosperity comes, often humility goes. When we lose our humility, we lose our dependence on God and our reverence for God ... we don't acknowledge Him as the source of our blessings.

Moses said, "Be careful. Things will be so good for you that your heart may become proud and you will forget the Lord."

Deuteronomy 8:17 - You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."

Deuteronomy 8:18 - 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 forefathers, as it is today.

Affluence and arrogance and independence go together. We think, "Look what I have done." And we forget that it is the Lord who has graciously enabled us to produce wealth.

Now I know it's odd to talk about affluence in our economy today, but it's really all relative. Many of you are doing well financially, or at least better than you were when you started out. But if you were to be honest you'd have to say that with that affluence has come a sense of independence. Maybe you're not as close to God as you were in times when you didn't take it for granted that you could pay your bills.

EXAMPLE: There's a sobering example of this in history. Many years after this time in Deuteronomy there was a king of the Babylonian Empire (present day Iraq). His name was Nebuchadnezzar, and he was one of the greatest leaders of the world of his day. One day he was walking along the roof of his palace. Daniel 4 tells us what happened to him.

Daniel 4:29 - Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,

Daniel 4:30 - he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

Remember what Moses warned Israel about?

Deuteronomy 8:17 - You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”

God has a way of dealing with such pride. Nebuchadnezzar lost everything. He was driven out from his palace and his people, and he went insane, and became like a wild animal.

But then something unique happens to this world leader. Daniel records Nebuchadnezzar’s own words:

Daniel 4:34 - At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

This is not one of Israel’s kings saying this. This is the king of Babylon. So Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity was restored. And so was his honor and splendor ... greater than ever. And what had Nebuchadnezzar’s learned from all that had happened to him?

Daniel 4:37 - Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Now today most Americans would cringe if a national leader made such a statement. Political correctness tells us that it isn’t appropriate for a king, or a president, or a governor to talk about God in this way.

ILLUSTRATION – Our governor Rick Perry issued an invitation to the other governors of the nation to attend a special prayer gathering that he is hosting in Houston next month. Now I don’t know the motivation of his heart in doing this. It’s not my place to judge that. But what floored me was that so many people think it is inappropriate for a national leader to admit that we need God’s help and to call people to fast and pray.

There was a time when Americans weren’t ashamed of God, or ashamed to admit that they need God.

ILLUSTRATION – Stephen Ambrose wrote a book several years ago entitled *D-Day*. And in the book he talks about the build-up leading to the invasion of France in WWII. On June 6, 1944 the invasion was finally launched. Back here in the US the news was released that 130,000 American,

British and Canadian troops were fighting to establish beach heads on the coast of German-occupied France.

That day President Franklin Roosevelt addressed the nation. Millions of Americans sat around their radios in their living rooms and listened as the President of the United States did something that seems almost foreign to us today. He said:

In this poignant hour, I ask you to join with me in prayer:

Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity.

Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith.

They will need Thy blessings. Their road will be long and hard. For the enemy is strong. He may hurl back our forces. Success may not come with rushing speed, but we shall return again and again; and we know that by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph.

They will be sore tried, by night and by day, without rest -- until the victory is won. The darkness will be rent by noise and flame. Men's souls will be shaken with the violences of war.

For these men are lately drawn from the ways of peace. They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate. They fight to let justice arise, and tolerance and goodwill among all Thy people. They yearn but for the end of battle, for their return to the haven of home.

Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom.

And for us at home -- fathers, mothers, children, wives, sisters, and brothers of brave men overseas, whose thoughts and prayers are ever with them -- help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice.

Many people have urged that I call the nation into a single day of special prayer. But because the road is long and the desire is great, I ask that our people devote themselves in a continuance of prayer.

As we rise to each new day, and again when each day is spent, let words of prayer be on our lips, invoking Thy help to our efforts.

Give us strength, too -- strength in our daily tasks, to redouble the contributions we make in the physical and the material support of our armed forces.

And let our hearts be stout, to wait out the long travail, to bear sorrows that may come, to impart our courage unto our sons wheresoever they may be.

And, O Lord, give us faith. Give us faith in Thee; faith in our sons; faith in each other; faith in our united crusade. Let not the keenness of our spirit ever be dulled. Let not the impacts of temporary events, of temporal matters of but fleeting moment -- let not these deter us in our unconquerable purpose.

With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogances. Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace -- a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men. And a peace that will let all of men live in freedom, reaping the just rewards of their honest toil.

Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt - June 6, 1944

And it wasn't just the President. Listen to how the national conscience of the nation in 1944 responded:

ILLUSTRATION – Read further quotes from Ambrose's book, pp.492-493.

We still need the favor and blessing of God. So there is the command, the caution, and the ...

3. CONSEQUENCES

Deuteronomy 8:19 - If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.

It is possible for a nation to forget the Lord. A nation that turns to pagan gods or false gods is in grave peril.

Deuteronomy 8:20 - Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.

I said earlier that God holds Israel to this standard. But He also holds all nations to this standard. It says in v.20 that God destroyed nations other than Israel for forgetting the Lord and for not obeying Him. As America, we can't expect that we will be exempt from this.

Nations are accountable to God ... all of them. God judges nations.

Psalms 9:19 - Arise, O LORD, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence.

Psalms 110:6 - He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.

CONCLUSION

Now Israel messed up. Before long they would forget the Lord. They would fail to praise Him and give Him thanks. They would falter in their faith in the Lord and their obedience to the commands of the Lord. In fact they began to take on the worship and the ways of the pagans who lived around them. But God anticipated this would happen. He knew they were weak. Hundreds of years after Israel entered the Promised Land they were at an important stage in their nation's history. They were about to have in the city of Jerusalem a temple. God had given the vision to King David and the specific plans were passed along to David's son, King Solomon.

Solomon was a great builder and when the Temple was completed they had a glorious day of dedication. And Solomon leads the gathering in a powerful prayer that went along these lines: "God, You and You alone are God. Hear the prayers that are offered in this place. When things go wrong and we sin and when we feel the consequences of our disobedience ... when there is no rain or when plagues come upon us or when there is war, even defeat in war ... Lord, if Your people turn back to You and pray, would you hear their prayers?"

One night after all these festivities were completed and life had returned to normal, the Lord appeared to Solomon and said this:

2 Chronicles 7:12 - "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.

2 Chronicles 7:13 - "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people,

2 Chronicles 7:14 - if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

That's a big "if," isn't it? So I leave you with these questions:

Could it be that our nation isn't all that interested in following God's ways because we, as His people are not passionate about following His ways?

Could it be that America doesn't want to talk *about* God because we as His people are not passionate about talking about Him?

Could it be that America isn't talking *to* God because God's people are not talking to God?

Could it be that America doesn't take God seriously because they have not seen us, the people of God, take Him seriously?

Could it be that America has forgotten the Lord because the churches of America are filled with God's people have forgotten the Lord?