

12/2/07

Sermon follow-up

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The message of the sermon can be summed up with a line from the liturgy: "It is very good and right that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, O Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Everlasting God."

In times of prosperity (Dt. 6:10-12) and in times of adversity (Dt. 6:16), we must remember God and give him thanks. The warnings about forgetting God in good times are balanced by warnings about forgetting (or doubting) God in hard times. As Paul says, in every circumstance we ought to give God thanks. Why? Because he uses all things for his glory and our good.

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Learning to remember God, his works, his promises, and his commands, is not just something we do so that we can privately pious. Much more is at stake. For one thing, we cannot teach our children to be grateful and to love God unless we are doing and demonstrating these things ourselves (Dt. 6:7-9, 20-25). Familial piety is in view throughout the chapter. Our children (and grandchildren) learn from our example more than any other form of instruction. As creatures, we have been made imitative beings, and it is vital that our impressionable youngsters have fitting models set before them. Live a life worthy of imitation.

But the implications are wider still. Ultimately, Moses is calling Israel to fulfill the purpose for which God chose her in the first place. Israel was to be God's new humanity. She was to model what true humanity looked like for the nations. Through her faith, her love, and her gratitude, she was to help the world remember her Creator. The people of God always have been and always will be a people on a mission. We've been set apart from the world for the good of the world. We carry a burden – it is a joyful burden, an easy burden, but a burden nonetheless. We bear God's purposes in the world. Our burden is to embody gratitude so that the world is drawn to give thanks as well, so they are drawn into this story of remembrance, obedience, and thanksgiving. God has blessed us in order that we might transmit his blessing to all the other nations of the earth (Gen. 12).

Moses makes this point just a couple chapters earlier in Deuteronomy, in passage that shapes and textures the whole message of the book. In 4:5-9, we hear:

5 "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. 6 Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is

your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'

7 "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? 8 And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? 9 Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.

Our lives have an audience. The nations are watching. Our role is demonstrate to the nations the wisdom of God's Word and works so they will be in awe of him. And once again, the key is not forgetting the things God has done on our behalf.

Our basic orientation in life is to be one of thankfulness. The quality of our lives should show that we have much to be thankful for and that we are driven by gratitude. God has given us his Word, he's shown us mercy, he's drawn near to us. The whole point of being God's people and living as his new Israel is to remember him with hearts full of gratitude, making his gracious and glorious reign visible in the sight of the nations.