

God the provider

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[0 : 0 0] Deuteronomy 8. We're going to be reading the first part of Deuteronomy 8. In the first week, as one of the sections, we read the latter part of Deuteronomy 8, but tonight we're going to read the first few verses together.

So Deuteronomy 8, beginning at verse 1. Now hear God's word. The whole commandment that I command you today, you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to you, swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you for these 40 years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let your hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that the man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on you, and your foot did not swell these 40 years. Know then that in your heart that a man disciplines his son, the Lord your

God disciplines you, so that you keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and of springs, flowing out into valleys and to hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees, of pomegranates and a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and out of the hills you can dig copper. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. Well may God bless that word, his word, to us this evening.

Would you please open your Bibles again to Deuteronomy 8, if you've closed them.

If I can just draw your attention to the reference here to manna in Deuteronomy 8. And by way of, by doing that, I want to draw your attention also to Exodus 16 and 17. I don't want you to turn there, but if you were to read those two chapters, Exodus 16 and 17, you would read the whole account of the manna, the bread from heaven, the bread of heaven, and the water that came from the rock. Now these are pivotal points in Israel's history, but this evening we're going to focus just here on Deuteronomy 8. And as we do, this is the third message of God's blessing, or rather the third message focusing on God's blessing. And it's also the concluding message focusing on God's blessing.

[3 : 5 2] And so by way of reminder, let me just remind you what the first two messages were about. The first message was for us to consider the greater. And now this is a phrase, or at least a stratagem used in scripture a lot, for us to be able to see the difference between the lesser and the greater. Normally it comes in phrases like, how much more? How much more will your father care for you? That's a consideration of the greater compared to the lesser. Well, in the first message, we were to consider that it was better to be a blessed man than it is to be a brilliant man. Okay?

It's better to be a blessed man than it is to be a brilliant man. It is better to have your prayers answered than to have necessarily the best education in the world that money can buy. Okay? It's better to have God's blessing than what you can get at your own hands or at your own expense. The blessings is considerably greater than the greatest thing on earth. Okay? The blessings of God are greater than the greatest thing on earth. Now the trouble is, is the inherent danger with that is to forget that that's the case. And then to assume that you end up and have got the blessings of God as the result of your own brilliance. You know, you forget that God is the source of all blessing. And then somewhere down the road, you have all this blessing and you think, well, aren't I clever? And then you begin to rely on your own means and the danger is that you begin to move away from God because your focus has gone from the blessings to your own brilliance. And that's an inherent danger which we saw the first time of God's people had to be told, when you come into the land and you have all these blessings, don't be tempted to think that they came about by the work of your own hands. Okay? Because they didn't. But the moment you do think you've only gone and thrown away all the blessings. And that's how you throw away the blessings of God, by thinking that you did something to get them in the first place, when you didn't.

Now the second message concerns the truth that blessings accumulate over time and therefore we can miss them. Okay? We've seen plenty of stories in the church and in the world of people who have been blessed, accumulated with blessings over years and years and years, and then in one year throw it all away. And the reason why that happens, the reason why men don't throw everything away in their 20s is because they don't have anything to throw away. The reason why men are tempted to throw away things in their 40s is because now that they have a bit. But when they get into their 50s and even 60s, there's an inherent danger to throw it all away because they have something to throw away.

You look at the life of Solomon, why did he throw so much away? Well, because he had so much to throw away. Okay? Why did David throw so much away? Well, because he had so much to throw away. The inherent danger is that we forget to see that accumulated blessings still come from God. It's just that because they've been accumulated over a course of years, we end up thinking, I've received this by the work of my own hands. Aren't I brilliant? We go back to the default of, I must have done something right to get it. I must be cleverer than my neighbor because look what I have and he doesn't. There's the inherent danger. And the moment you think that, you end up losing the blessing. Okay? You can lose the blessing easily. So now we come to the third message of God, or the third message of God on blessing.

We need to consider a very crucial issue, and that is that it hasn't always been this way. When you've lived with God's blessing for a long time, the temptation is to think it's always been like this. And that's a dangerous temptation to think, well, I've had it good for a long time now, even if it's only a short time in comparison, but to then think, well, it's always been this way.

[8 : 15] The danger here is that you've got so used to the blessings of God being around that you think they're always going to be around. That you've got so used to having the blessings every day at your disposal that you think, well, they're always going to be there. But as Job found out, God is a God who gives and a God who takes away. Okay? The Lord gives and he takes. And that's the type of God that we belong to. And here in this passage, God has to teach this very lesson to these people because they just don't get it. We tend to forget the importance of the Lord giving and taking away, and it's a crucial lesson. So here's the summary of the passage. God's people, or rather God is moving his people from or through the wilderness into the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land flowing with olive trees and honey and pomegranates. It's a blessed time, a place where there is bread and no scarcity. It is a place full of God's blessing, but they've not got there yet.

Okay? God has everything for them when they arrive, but they have not yet arrived into the land. God is leaving them there. They have to walk. But the way that they get into the land is by listening to God's word. The more closely they listen to God's word, the less likely they are to go around in circles. But let's bear in mind that they wandered in circles for 40 years. That's an indication of just how good God's people are at listening to him. A journey that should have taken no more than about 11 to 15 days lasted 40 years. And that's an indication of how good that they were at listening to God. Okay? God could not lead them into the land of blessing until they were ready to receive the land of blessing. And it's exactly the same for us as Christians here as we sit here this evening.

The other thing that God does here is that he makes them hungry so that he can feed them. And that's so that we can understand the connection. And that's an important connection.

God makes us hungry so that he can feed us. He wants to reveal what's in our heart, not so that he can know, but so that we can know. The only way we can understand how God deals with us and why God deals us the way that he does is if God reveals our own heart to us. If he doesn't do that, we struggle to understand why God is dealing with us in the way that he is. Why don't I have this? Why can't I go there? Why am I struggling in this area? Well, the thing that you need to do if you're asking those type of questions is look at your own heart. God is revealing it to you to show you why he's dealing with you the way that he is. And that's exactly what he does here with these people. He needs to reveal their heart, not so that he can see, he sees, but so that they can see and understand why they're still wandering around in the wilderness all this time. So verse three, God made them hungry so that he could feed them so that they could understand the connection. Okay. God made them hungry so that he could fill them so that they would understand that connection. Verse three,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that it is a deceitful thing to say that man can live by bread alone when God has specifically said that man cannot live by bread alone. You cannot live by bread alone.

[11 : 59] God made them hungry to teach them. It says here that man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from his mouth. That's the lesson that they had to learn. The lesson here has more to do than with just food. It has to do with listening to the God of blessing, listening to the God who can make you hungry and who can feed you. So without going into too much detail, we need to remember that God is the sustainer of our life, not just the creator, but the sustainer.

Okay. He can make us go hungry and he can feed us. Think about it this way. When God created the world, he didn't do it with hammers and soles. Okay. He didn't even do it with seed. He didn't do it with a muddy field and he didn't do it with water. Okay. Now you look at the way we make things now.

A farmer goes out and sows his field. Okay. A carpenter will pick up his tools and they'll go to work and so forth and so on. God didn't do that. He spoke. And as he spoke, everything was brought into existence. Okay. The connection that we are meant to make between the creation account and the bread account here is that when God speaks, you need to understand that your life is a product of God speaking. Okay. You live because God speaks. In the same way the world exists because God speaks, you live, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

That's why you live. You are sustained by his words. Now the temptation here is to forget it. Imagine it like this. Your eldest son or your eldest daughter leaves home.

And now they're standing on their own two feet for the very first time as it appears. And as they leave home and stand on their own two feet, they forget how they got there. Okay. Nobody's brought into this world as, as leaving home, standing on your own two feet. You must have got there somehow.

[14 : 18] Now, if that person, if that boy or that girl just stands for a moment and thinks about it, they may not be able to remember every fit, every meal that their mom cooked them.

But they will know if they put a little bit of thought into it, that they needed everyone to get to where they are today. Every single one of them. They may not have known that the, their clothes changed over the years and changed sizes and changed fashion, but they know that they needed clothes every day to get to where they are with a little bit of thought. They may not have known the type of money it costs to give them a warm house to live in, to put food on the table and a warm bed to sleep in. But with a little bit of thought, okay, they'll realize that they don't get to where they are today without all of that that is gone before. And this is what God wants us to understand.

We think we stand on our own two feet, but how did you ever get to stand on your own two feet? You got there because God blessed you. And the only reason you can stand on your own two feet today is because God continues to bless you. So we need to put a little bit of thought into it rather than succumb to the temptation of thinking, I've done it all by myself. Well, you know you didn't all do it all by yourself. So God can do great things for believers.

And believers can find themselves in a place of great blessing and then still succumb to the temptation of thinking, I got myself here. That's the temptation that we all fall into.

After it doesn't take long for us to think after enjoying the blessings of God, to think either I deserved it anyway, or it's a product of my own hands. Just look at what God has to deal with.

[16 : 12] He has to deal with the people who cannot see the blessings. They cannot see what God does for them. And so that's the summary here. God wants his people to see what God is doing for them. And they need to overcome the temptation of thinking, it's always been this way. But it's always been this way.

So let's get to the subject, manna from heaven. You'll notice in verse three, that God reminds his people that he humbled them, let them hunger, and then fed them so that they would understand the connection. He humbled them, let them go hungry so that he could feed them. Okay? He let them go hungry so that he could feed them. Understand the connection because this is important. Okay? In other words, their hunger and their fullness is down to God. God supplies their act of weaknesses here.

In Exodus 16, we learn that the manna that God provided was provided from heaven. In other words, it was bread that fell out the sky. Now that's crucially important. Okay? Don't think about it as a miracle, as such. Just think about just how important a lesson that is. And here's why. Because you and I know, okay, or at least we should know, that bread doesn't come out of heaven, it comes out of the ground, right? Bread doesn't come out of heaven, it comes out of the ground. That's correct, isn't it?

No, that's not correct. That's actually very wrong. And that was the very mistake that these people were making. Because bread doesn't come out of heaven, it comes from God. Okay? It doesn't come from the ground, it comes from God. In order for God's people to understand that God was the provider of bread and not the ground, he sent it a different way. That's the lesson. In order for God's people to truly understand that the ground did not provide the bread for them, but God did, he sent it a different way. He sent it from heaven. That's the lesson here. Up to this point, in Egypt and everywhere else, and even in the land of Canaan, God will provide bread through the ground, through the fields. Okay?

People will go out into the fields and reap the grain and turn the grain into bread and then think, what has this got to do with God? It's always been that way. It's a product of my own hands.

[18 : 58] And so because people are tempted to harvest a field after years and years and years of doing it, and then summarize in their own head, well, it's always been this way. Okay? They are then tempted to think of, well, look what I've achieved. So God decided to send it another way, to teach them that bread does not come from there. It actually comes from him. The reason why God sent manna from heaven rather than manna from the ground, bread from the ground, was to teach them that the ground is not the provider. He is the provider. He sent it a different way so that they would understand. He sent it a different way so that they could learn that he is the source of bread, not the ground or their own hands. It fell out of heaven rather than came out of the ground so that the people would sit up and take notice. I mean, how surprised do you think you would be to go out into the field one day and there's no grain growing, but there's bread falling from heaven. Okay? You would take notice. You would, suddenly, suddenly you would stand there wondering, scratching your head on what is happening. And that's the point.

Sometimes you can get so used to the fact that it has always been this way that you forget that it's from God. And so God changes things up a little. He does it differently so as to bring your attention back onto the true provider, the true source, who is God. God is the provider. And that's the lesson here. But I want you to imagine this in reverse slightly. A young boy who's born into the wilderness, which would have happened, and he grows up, and he's wandering through the wilderness, and all these years God is sending bread from heaven. How long do you think it would take that boy to grow up and think, it's always been this way? How long, right? Even something as miraculous of bread falling out of heaven loses its specialness because it's always been this way. And that's the temptation. So God changes things up to remind people constantly that he is the source of blessing, not the ground and not the sky. It also says here in verse 4 to reinforce this truth that their clothing did not wear out and their foot did not swell. Again, God is making the point that he needs to point things out. He makes them hungry so that he can feed them, so as to bring them to attention, to make them take notice. The thing to be observed here is how God does things.

Because it's easy to forget what God actually does and how God does it. In the same way, when we're full, we don't think about food. Some people might if they're gluttonous. Okay? But generally speaking, if you're full, you don't think about food. And this is why you should never go to Asda or Tesco's when you're hungry. Because you can guarantee your food bill is going to be more expensive. Okay?

He who is full, he who is full loathes honey, but to him who is hungry, every bitter thing is sweet. What does that taste like? I've never had one of those before. Well, let's... Okay? Hunger makes you yearn and want something. And God makes his people hungry to go after him, to be full on God. But when your shoes don't wear out, you don't think about getting a new pair, unless, of course, you're caught up in fashion. But generally speaking, when they're fine, they will do. Okay? If your coat doesn't wear out, you keep the same coat until you need a new one. But you don't think about, you don't think about where it came from. You don't think about how you got it. All you think is, I've had this for three years. I've had this for five years. You're like the teenager that leaves home, standing on your own two feet, forgetting how you got there. God got you there. The reason why you have what you have is because God gave it to you. But it doesn't take any of us long at all to forget that. We seem to forget it really, really easily, that we have what we have because God gave it to us. And so God has to take it away. He has to make a church hungry. He has to remove the blessing so that we would yearn after the blessing and make the connection that it comes from him, not from our own hands, or the fact that it's always been this way. That's how God works to teach us. God then says in verse 7, that once they've learned the lesson, they're about to be brought into a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees, olives and honey, verse 8, into a land lacking nothing, verse 9. But before God can do any of that, he has to teach them to remember that he is the source of every blessing.

Because if he doesn't, they'll get into the land and enjoy all these blessings and think, so he's been this way. Look what we've stumbled upon. Aren't we lucky? Didn't we do well? We need to understand that God is the God of the wheat field. We need to understand that God is the God of the olive tree. We need to understand that God is the God of the pomegranates. We need to understand that God is the God of all of these blessings. And yet someone will look out onto the field and go, well, it's always been like that. Yes, it has always been like that because of God. That's the answer.

[24 : 50] It has always been like that because of God. There's a reason why that saying is true, that you don't know what you've got until you lose it. Because it's true.

The ability to think that it's, because it's always been there, it'll always be there, okay, is what fools us into the temptation of not really valuing what we have. We take it for granted because we can take it for granted. And so God makes them hungry. He takes it away just to show them that you're not to take it for granted, but to recognize it is a blessing from God.

So here's the conclusion. Last time we saw that there's a danger of not receiving enough wisdom to make the distinction between what is God's blessing and what is an everyday occurrence.

The danger here is perpetuated. That we have to see that what we have is God's blessing and not fall into the temptation of thinking, it's always been like that. Yeah, we have swings and roundabouts.

We have highs and lows. The tide comes in and it goes out again. But generally speaking, everything will come back as it went. Okay, swings and roundabouts. This is to leave God out of the picture. This is to forget God, the God who's in control of the world. This is to think that things go and return and that God has nothing to do with it. But God has everything to do with it. So as verse 10 teaches us, let me read it to you. And you shall eat and be full and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. When God brings you into a place of blessing blessing and you get to enjoy all of those blessings, you are not to forget how you got them.

[26 : 47] You are not to forget how you get to enjoy all these things. And once you enjoy them, once you're sat at God's table enjoying these blessings, you are meant to say thank you. Verse 10 is God telling his people that when you get to this place and enjoy it, don't forget to say thank you.

You shall bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. Don't forget to say thankful. Thank you. Here's the exhortation then. It is a deceitful thing to think, to believe, and to say that you can live on bread alone.

Rather than the lesson that your life is sustained because God speaks, man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Bread doesn't come from the ground and it doesn't come from the sky. It comes from God. Your clothes do not come from the shops. Your shoes don't come either. Your food doesn't come from the shops. It doesn't even come from the fields in which it grows. It comes from a God who blesses. That's what we are to understand.

Next time you go into the supermarket and you take a loaf of bread off the shop, you may be tempted to think, I can get it cheaper in Asda. But what you should really be thinking is, thank you, God. Thank you, God. God blesses. Now, God can choose to let us go without, and I pray that he doesn't. I pray that we have enough wisdom to learn this lesson without experiencing the lesson. Okay? Wisdom teaches that children are to learn lessons without experiencing them. Okay? To avoid the pitfalls. I pray as a church that we would learn this lesson without the need to experience the lesson. I pray that we would see this truth without the need to follow that truth through into the experience just to convince us. But it does seem to be the case that both children and adults alike seem to need the consequence and the experience to really learn the lesson. But there is another way to learn the lesson, and that is live by God's word.

Live by God's word. He is the provider. He is the source of blessing in the life and in the church. And so as God has brought you into a time of blessing personally and as a church, remember to say thank you.

[29 : 17] We ought to remember to say thank you. So thank you, God. Amen.