

He Humbled You

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

My goal this morning is not simply to learn about what is happening in the life of the nation of Israel, but to really understand how these events as Israel prepared to enter the promised land apply clearly and directly to our lives today. This isn't just Old Testament history. And it certainly isn't an account that suggests in any way some system of works salvation. This is not part of some covenant of works by which Israel was obligated to obey the law without reference to the hope and promise of the gospel.

So my focus this morning is upon that combination, that relationship between the obedience of God's people and God's own work of redemption as it is promised in the gospel. The law and the gospel. Faith and works. It's such a key subject in terms of understand how the whole Bible fits together.

What we have in our text is clearly an obligation to obey the law. That's where the chapter starts. That's the focal point.

v.1

I intend to keep that focal point of obedience to the law as I preach this morning. But we will see very clearly how that obedience to which God calls his people is related to the promise of the gospel. In that context, these verses apply to us as God's people today in exactly the same way as they applied to God's people of Israel in the Old Covenant. With that thought, I will begin with the observation that,

I. OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW IS RELATED TO A PROMISE OF BLESSING.

The duty and obligation is clear enough, "Every

commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe." That's the starting point. Now let's dig a little deeper to understand the covenant relationship which God has established with his people, and try to figure out the place that our obedience has in that relationship. As I've put it, that obedience is related to a promise of blessing, as we read in the whole of,

v.1

Also, v.6

So that's where we start, with the realization that the law and the promise go together. In fact, the law embodies the promise. We see that in the New Testament exposition of the 5th commandment in,

Eph. 6:1 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: 3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

Remember, of course, that same promise was embedded in the actual commandment when it was given at Mt. Sinai and repeated again in Deuteronomy. The law was never designed to be harsh or burdensome. It was never designed to be oppressive, but good. Indeed, a delight. And when the law is your delight, then it will go well with you! That is to say, your relationship with God will be healthy and profitable.

More specifically, though, look at,

v.2

I want to start by looking at the first half of that verse, the urging to remember what the Lord had done! That's such a key phrase. Remember what the Lord has done for his people. Specifically, here is it is, "remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness."

When the ten commandments were repeated here in Deuteronomy, that focus was made clear with the 4th commandment regarding the sabbath day,

Deut. 5:15 “And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

That’s what the passover day was all about as well.

Ex. 13:3 “And Moses said to the people: “Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten.”

That Exodus was the salvation event for the whole nation. That was the day when they were redeemed, when they were saved. And that’s where this promise of blessing comes from. It’s not a promise of earthly or worldly prosperity, but a promise of spiritual health and life. If I may say it this clearly, it is the promise of salvation. Salvation accomplished by God in the past.

A. The promise of blessing is grounded in God’s past work of redemption.

God has saved you, you who trust in Jesus for your eternal life. God has redeemed you, you by faith have received that gift of eternal life. And God accomplished that redemption for us not when Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, but when Jesus died upon the cross.

So remember what God has done for you, in sending Jesus to die for your sins. The blessing of the gospel for us is grounded in that work which Jesus has so completely finished. And so we read in,

Heb. 9:11 “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things

to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant...”

So remember what God has done to save your soul! But there is another focus as well, a focus upon not just what God did in the past, but what he promises to do in the future. More fully,

B. The promise of blessing is focused upon the future completion of God’s work of redemption.

Now I hope it is beginning to make sense, this blessing. The blessing is what awaits us, just as it was for the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 8. For them, that blessing is described this way, v.7-9

It really was a great land! All of that language emphasizes the fruitfulness and productivity of the land. And what does that land represent for us today? I hope you know the answer to that question by now in our study of Deuteronomy. The answer is heaven. And we today are in the same position as these people of Israel, waiting to enter our promised land of heaven. So our faith is the same as the faith of Abraham,

Heb. 11:8 “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10

for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Heb. 12:22 “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.”

So, going back to my main focus, obedience to the law is related to that promise of blessing that is ours in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Secondly,

II. OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW IS PERFORMED IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMBLING AND TESTING.

In other words, as we wait for heaven, God is at work in our lives, humbling us and testing us. That’s exactly what we read in, v.2-5

So again, how does that apply to us? And my immediate answer is that it applies to us exactly as it applied to the Israelites in Moses’ day. The external circumstances are very different, but the meaning and purpose of God’s work is entirely unchanged. Specifically,

A. God humbles and tests you in order to reveal what is in your heart.

That’s what the 40 years in the wilderness were all about. Humbling and testing. And while we live on this earth, in this age, we are living in that same wilderness.

God is not testing us in order to trip us up. He is engaged in some cosmic power game, taking some sort of selfish glee out of making our lives miserable. Rather he is humbling and testing us

for a very specific purpose, to reveal what is in your heart. Pure and simple.

That’s exactly what the words say, isn’t it?
v.2

Sometimes he tests us to see if we will obey. For the same reason that a really good teacher or a really good professor will test us in school. To see if we have learned the material. And to help us learn it. I can say without question the most influential teacher I ever had in terms of shaping my mind and helping me understand what he was teaching, also gave the hardest tests of any teacher I ever had. And the most difficult assignments. Why? Because he wanted us to learn the material. My grades were lower in his classes, because of this challenge to learn. And I learned more from him than anyone else. In his case, that was the teaching of what the Bible as a whole is all about.

For God, the “material” he wants us to learn is submission. To him. Submission demonstrated by obedience. Love, and honor, demonstrated by obedience. Devotion and worship, demonstrated by obedience. He works in our lives in order to make evident and obvious the nature and character of your heart.
v.2

Do you remember what the Lord said to Samuel about his choice of King for Israel.

1 Sam. 16:7 “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

The Lord looks at the heart! Then and now. Similarly,
1 Tim. 1:5 “Now the purpose of the commandment is love

from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.”

Jesus was always concerned with the heart, not simply with the outward appearance, not simply with the external ritual. So, for example, it’s not that the ceremonial washing of hands was so important. It’s not just what you eat that makes you clean or unclean. It is a matter of the heart.

Mark 7:6 "So Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? 17 Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? 18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”

So, Psalm 24:3 “Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”

Testing, and humbling, is necessary, and useful, in making clear what might otherwise be hidden in the heart. So what is in your heart? That’s a penetrating question, isn’t it? That’s the goal of this study, to allow the word of God to expose your heart. And surely it can!

Heb. 4:2 “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

So here we are this morning, naked before God. It’s not a pretty sight, is it? Thankfully, that’s just an image, but a very

useful one. We can’t hide our hearts from God. We can’t hide behind any covering. We can’t pretend, not before God. And we can’t fool him.

Now, in a sense, all of that is a bit negative, exposing the folly of an insincere heart. But the humbling and testing is also used by God to purify our hearts, to reveal what is in your heart in a good way. And I would propose to you that that sort of humbling and test is a very, very good thing. Indeed, it is through humbling and testing that your faith “is tested by fire.” And if I can continue that quote from 1 Peter 1, that your faith...

1 Peter 1:7 “...may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith —the salvation of your souls.”

God humbles and tests you in order to reveal what is in your heart. And to purify what is in your heart. He does something else as well, and like that first thought, God has worked this way with his creatures ever since the garden of Eden.

B. God humbles and tests you in order to learn to trust him.

I’m not going to pretend that this is easy, but it is valuable. And the example given is the manna in the desert.

v.3

There was a point in that daily provision of manna. And there was a valuable lesson to be learned. And it is a lesson that we must all continue to learn, “that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

And so the Lord gave the people a daily ration of manna every day. They could not accumulate any extra without it going bad. They were to trust him every day!

Life is not just about earthly and worldly success. Life is not just about happiness and prosperity, comfort and well-being. Life isn't even about having enough money to buy food! What matters in life, above all else, is that you trust the Lord no matter what the particular circumstances might be. You walk by faith, not by sight.

“Man shall not live by bread alone.” Even Jesus had to learn that, didn't he? Through a very specific test that God ordained for him to endure.

Mat. 4:1 “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” 4 But He answered and said, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.””

That's the ultimate lesson of life. And it's not something you can learn by reading a book. It's something you learn in the experiences of life, in the humbling and testing of life.

v.3

And it's not a cruel or unfair test at all. There is nothing mean or harmful here at all—just look at how the experiences of the Israelites are described as they undergo this test.

v.4-5

God provided for them kindly. And he showed them his power. That's a lesson the Apostle Paul had to learn through his own humbling and testing, that which he called a “thorn in the flesh.”

He asked for it to be taken away, three times, and it was not.

2 Cor. 12:7 “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

In other words, “man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.” So when God humbles you, when God tests you, study well this material that he would have you to learn. Study well this same material that Jesus learned. “Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

That's the context for our obedience to God's law, as it was for Adam and Eve all the way back in the Garden of Eden. One more thing though. One more thought about this call to obedience.

III. OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW IS INSEPARABLY LINKED TO YOUR GRATEFUL APPRECIATION FOR GOD'S MERCY.

And so we read in,

v.10

In other words,

A. God's mercy allows you to gain a satisfaction in your soul.

“When you have eaten and are full...” For the Israelites, of course, that was experienced literally. Outwardly, physically. After all, as we’ve read, it was a good land!

I would propose that just such an experience is ourselves, in heaven of course, but also here on the earth as a foretaste. And so we read, for example,

Ps. 34:8 “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him! 9 Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. 10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.”

Given the reality of humbling and testing, we can hardly say the reference point to that promise is found in the things of this world. Sometimes the circumstances of this life are hard. Anything but good, from the perspective of our own experience. But in the context of God’s mercy, in the context of the confidence and certainty of the promise of the gospel, that there is an inheritance reserved in heaven for you who believer, and that the Lord is preparing you to receive that inheritance, then this reminder of God’s mercy is able to satisfy your soul.

The words of Isaiah 40 come into focus,
Is. 40:28 “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, 31 But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.”

And then, with that satisfaction in your soul, you are prompted to respond to God.

B. Satisfaction in your soul allows you to give thankful praise to God for his mercy.

v.10

“Bless the Lord” means to give him honor. Literally, the word has reference to your knee, bending the knee. In adoration. It is the praise so clearly expressed in the words of,

Psalms 103:1 “Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: 3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, 5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

I hope you see this cycle at work, a good cycle. When you identify and recognize God’s mercy, then you can know what it is to be satisfied in your soul. And when you are satisfied in your soul with God’s mercy, you are greatly motivated in your desires to give praise and honor to the Lord. And that is what stimulates your pursuit of obedience to the law. Obedience to the law is inseparably linked to your grateful appreciation for God’s mercy.

So, you who love God, you who love Jesus, recognize that mercy that God has shown to you. And bless him.

v.10 “When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.”

Or, in the words of Isaiah,

Is. 61:10 “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of

salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.”

And then, listen to what God says to you in his law, and in this delight which is in your soul, obey him.

v.1

v.6-10