

A Dangerous Blessing
May 3, 2015

I want to give you wisdom today, from the Bible, that can save you money, give you more free time, and make your life less stressful. Anybody want any of those?

We're going to look at two Old Testament passages this morning. The Bible is made up of two parts, the Old Testament and New Testament. **The word testament means covenant.** The Old Testament addresses the covenant relationship that the Israelites had with God. The New Testament teaches us about the covenant relationship that Christians have with God through Jesus Christ. Yet, there is much wisdom that Christians can learn from reading the old covenant part of the Bible.

We're going to look first at a passage in the book of Deuteronomy concerning the Israelites. At this point in their history, the Israelites are getting ready to enter the land of Canaan. Canaan was nicknamed The Promised Land because God had promised this area to Abraham's descendants centuries before (Genesis 12:7).

The Israelites had spent 400 years in Egypt, the last part of that time as slaves of the Egyptians. Through the prophet Moses, God rescued the Israelites. Now, after 40 years of freedom, they are getting ready to take over the land of Canaan.

The Canaanite people were terribly immoral. God had been warning them for centuries to change their ways, but they would not do so. So God, through the Israelites, was going to bring justice upon them. This was not murder. This was not ethnic cleansing. This was the perfect, righteous, just judge of all the earth bringing judgment and condemnation upon a people who consistently refused to turn from their sinful ways.

The result was going to be that the Canaanites would leave behind houses, barns, farms, vineyards, animals, towns, and cities. The Israelites were going to move right in to these existing places. They were not buying or building from the ground up. It was like a gift, like being the family on the Extreme Makeover TV show. It was like winning big in the lottery.

Life was going to go from austere to very comfortable for the Israelites. For forty years they had lived in tents, in the wilderness, eating mostly manna, and drinking water. Now they were going to inherit farms, towns, and much more. And things would only get better from there as God prospered them.

What a wonderful blessing this would be. But it was a dangerous blessing. In Deuteronomy 8 God warns them of the danger of such a blessing. It is this warning that we need to read this morning.

Deuteronomy 8:6-14 (NIV) Observe the commands of... (Yahweh) your God, walking in his ways and revering him. For... (Yahweh) 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; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; 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. When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise... (Yahweh) your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget... (Yahweh) your God, failing to observe his

commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget... (Yahweh) your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

The result of forgetting God would be failure to live a grateful life, a worshipful life, trusting in God and obeying His commands. History shows that the Israelites, for the most part, DO become proud and DO forget God. They fail to worship only Yahweh and obey Him. It wasn't entirely due to the comfortable lifestyle God gave them, but that WAS a part of it.

In the New Testament, Jesus warns His disciples that it is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. It was hard then, and it is hard today. The person who is well off is tempted to say, "I don't have need of God. I have everything I need." This person thinks God has not had a part in enabling such a lifestyle. That is one danger of living comfortably.

Another danger of living comfortably is to say, "If God were not pleased with me, or wanted more of me, my life would not be in such good shape." I have been told such things by unbelievers.

In both these cases false assumptions are made about God. In both cases someone enjoys material blessings without giving God what is due Him. Both of these illustrate the danger inherent in such blessings.

God was giving the Israelites a good blessing. But it was not a safe blessing. God was giving them a dangerous blessing.

We are now going to look at one of the most remarkable historical accounts in the Old Testament. It is a long passage, but I believe you will find it worth the read.

Jeremiah 35:1-11 (NIV) This is the word that came to Jeremiah from... (Yahweh) during the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: "Go to the Recabite family and invite them to come to one of the side rooms of the house of... (Yahweh) and give them wine to drink."

So I went to get Jaazaniah son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brothers and all his sons--the whole family of the Recabites. I brought them into the house of... (Yahweh), into the room of the sons of Hanan son of Igdaliah the man of God. It was next to the room of the officials, which was over that of Maaseiah son of Shallum the doorkeeper. Then I set bowls full of wine and some cups before the men of the Recabite family and said to them, "Drink some wine."

But they replied, "We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jonadab son of Recab gave us this command: 'Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine.

Also you must never build houses, sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things, but must always live in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.'

We have obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab son of Recab commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine or built houses to live in or had vineyards, fields or crops. We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab commanded us. But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded this

land, we said, 'Come, we must go to Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian and Aramean armies.' So we have remained in Jerusalem."

Jeremiah 35:18-19 (NIV) Then Jeremiah said to the family of the Recabites, "This is what... (Yahweh of hosts), the God of Israel, says: 'You have obeyed the command of your forefather Jonadab and have followed all his instructions and have done everything he ordered.' Therefore, this is what... (Yahweh of hosts), the God of Israel, says: 'Jonadab son of Recab will never fail to have a man to serve me.'"

I am impressed. This man, Jonadab, was leading the family of Recab when the time came to enter the land of Canaan. He heard the warning that God shared about enjoying the good things of the land. He realized it was a dangerous blessing and determined that he would not partake of it. He would not take a share of the good that God was offering him. He would not settle in one of the towns. He would not build a house. He would not inherit farm land and vineyards. He would turn it down. In doing so, he would avoid the temptations and dangers that came with those blessings.

There was no command that he do this. There was no suggestion from God that a person might do this. Jonadab determined on his own that he would do this. He did this out of devotion to God. He did it to preserve his family. For 640 plus years his family had lived in The Promised land as nomads. And as late as the mid 1800's travelers to the Mideast discovered nomads who claimed to be the descendents of Jonadab, of the Recabites. Given God's promise to them, I do not doubt that they are still around.

It was as if someone said, "Here is a winning lottery ticket" and he said, "I don't want it. And I'm telling my children not to accept it either." He must have been some kind of great man and father because his family continued to live that way. Even though God offered blessings, he turned them down, not to mock God, but out of devotion to God. He turned them down from a desire to remain faithful to God. That is pretty impressive.

What message does God have for us today?

Realize that there is danger in the material blessings you have.

God has blessed you materially. Just to live in America is a great blessing. If you have a family income of \$30,000 you are richer than 90% of the people on this planet. If you have a family income of \$50,000 you are in the top 1% of incomes worldwide. Most of us do not consider ourselves to be rich since we cannot go out and buy whatever we wish. But we are comfortable, very comfortable. That comfort poses a danger to our relationship with God.

Many years ago, now, a Christian couple was ministering to believers in Eastern Europe, behind the Iron Curtain. The couple had brought in Christian literature, blankets, and other necessary items. At the church gathering, the couple assured the believers that Christians in America were praying for believers in Eastern Europe.

"We are happy for that," one believer replied, "but we feel that Christians in America need more prayer than we do. We here in Eastern Europe are suffering, but you in America are very comfortable; and **"It is always harder to be a good Christian when you are comfortable."**

This is the danger that God warned the Israelites of before they entered The Promised Land. This is the danger of which Jesus warned His disciples. Paul warned the new churches of this danger. This is the warning you and I need to hear. The very things we so enjoy each day are a danger to our hearts, our souls. Let us heed these warnings.

Luke 12:15 (NIV) Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Hebrews 13:5 (NIV) Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

1 Timothy 6:6-8 (NIV) But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

Will you heed these warnings? Granted, to live in our society you need more than food and clothing. You need a place to live, though not necessarily a house or something you own instead of rent. You need some kind of heat. You need a job. You need access to transportation. You need a Bible. You need something to cook with. You need electricity. But what else do you really need? There is probably much more that you may want, but what else do you really need? We don't need most of what our homes are crammed.

We want more than basic needs met. We want comfort. We want entertainment. We want variety. And God has enabled us to have these. But that does not mean they are safe. Our money and possessions are not safe if they control us. In Matthew 19, Jesus told the rich young ruler to give up all that HE had because it controlled him.

To what extent is your stuff controlling you? Think about that. How much of the stress of your life is due to all the things you think you need to buy? Why are we so busy these days? Isn't it true that we are busy getting, using, guarding, repairing, replacing, or updating all of our stuff? Isn't it true that we have more recreational opportunities than anyone in history and want to take full advantage of these?

Our material goods don't simplify our lives, they complicate our lives. They steal time from us, time we could be using for better things.

In prayer, answer the following questions:

Is there some possession or activity that is keeping you from prayer and time in God's word?

Is there a possession or activity that is becoming more important to you than living for Jesus?

If the answer is yes, God is convicting you of that truth this morning. Will you turn loose of these possession or activity? Maybe there is some blessing you want to have that now, like Jonadab, you will refuse to pursue or accept for the rest of your life. Do it for God. Do it for your relationship to Him. Do to protect yourself from at least some of the dangerous blessings available to you.