

“The Path to Giving Thanks!”—Deuteronomy 8:2-6

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Path to Giving Thanks!”, is Deuteronomy 8:2-6 → *And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that 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 forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in His ways and by fearing Him.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“Well, when I was a child we were so poor that I remember savoring every morsel of food, even the crumbs left on the table. We saved the waxed paper from cereal boxes to reuse. Aluminum foil was reused over and over again until it fell apart. Our ‘running water’ was the water we pumped from the outside well and ‘ran’ with it in buckets to the house.

Our bathroom was outside too—an outhouse. Going to the bathroom was quite an “experience,” especially in the twenty below weather. I used to walk two miles to and from school . . . no matter what the weather . . . in snow up to my knees . . . against a 25 mile an hour wind . . . uphill all the w . . .”

Maybe you’ve heard such stories similar to this from your grandparents or have shared them from your own experiences as a child. Sometimes such stories are shared out of frustration over the ungrateful, “take it for granted,” entitled attitude which one may encounter in our “spoiled rotten” world today in an effort to explain why we should be thankful. The reasoning is rather simple: It is important to consider the life path upon which you have traveled in order for you to see how blessed you are today and be thankful.

While there is an element of truth to this concept it isn’t sufficient to sustain your path of giving thanks to Yahweh. Our text reveals His reason for why His people should give Him thanks as they prepare to experience blessings beyond description while standing on the borders of the promised land. They had experienced a hard path to giving thanks.

Moses reminded the people of Israel about the path which God had led them on so that they might appreciate more the path on which they would be led in the days to come. Their path to giving thanks? A forty

year journey in the desert. The purpose for this wilderness wandering is describe in our text as a humbling experience, *testing them to know what was in their heart, whether or not they would keep God's commandments* (Verse 2). He describes it in relationship terms in verse 5 → *Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.* This path to giving thanks was discipline? Why did they need to be disciplined?

Forty years prior to this day God commanded them to enter the promised land because He would give it to them. Of the twelve spies sent to “check out” the land, ten of them instilled fear in the Israelites so they chose to disobey Yahweh by refusing to enter it. (cf. Numbers 13:25-33) Aside from two spies who encouraged the people to trust the LORD and enter the land, Yahweh said in Numbers 14:22-23 → *None of the men who have seen My glory and My signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed My voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised Me shall see it.* It was a hard path to giving thanks as the people watched all but two people and their families *twenty years old and upward* die in the wilderness. (cf. Numbers 14:1-38) This path involved judgment upon their sin and disobedience so that they would come out of the experience more thankful and obedient!

Actually, remembering the past is important to thankful living. Moses

commanded the people to *remember the whole way that the LORD* had led them those *forty years in the wilderness*, feeding them *with manna* and not letting their *clothing . . . wear out* or their feet *swell* (Verses 2-4). As we remember how we have been provided for in the past we can truly see how God has led us down the path to giving thanks! Provisions in the past may not have been the same or as plentiful as they are today. Actually, there are times and circumstances where they may have also been more plentiful than today. Either way, God provides and strives to teach each of us *that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*. The path to continue giving thanks to Him is determined by His Word and our walking by faith in Him alone as our Creator, Preserver **and Savior**.

While Thanksgiving Day in our culture is declared as a government holiday seeking to move everyone in our nation to be thankful, it is still filled with sinners who grumble and complain in the midst of both plenty and want. While you can be thankful for a moment simply by counting your blessings, what happens when the ugliness of sin shows its face when the family is gathered together; when calamity strikes, taking your possessions and home; when you lose your job; when illness strikes; when a violent crime “hits home?” These are real situations where people experience the affects of sinfulness and to which many will cling in defiance of the LORD with disobedience and grumbling.

The struggle with sin is so deep that even those who “have it made in the shade” can fall into the sin of idolatry, fail to thank God and even defy Him. Thus, the real path to giving thanks is **the path Jesus walked** for sinners such as you and I. This path led Him to be obedient to God’s written Word as He *emptied Himself* of His heavenly glory, *taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men* for you. On that path *He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* (cf. Philippians 2:7-8) where He died as the sufficient sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins. On this path He rose from the dead so that by faith in Him your path of giving thanks will be more than simply a national holiday. It will be an eternal holy day with Jesus, praising, thanking and glorifying Him with myriads of other believers and the heavenly host!

Thus, your path to giving thanks right now this side of heaven begins and continues with confession and absolution. It is a path where you repent of your sins and hear the pronouncement of forgiveness in the stead, by the command and based upon the accomplished work of Jesus for you. This must determine our path of giving thanks because *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* (cf. Romans 3:23-24). Thus, while God provides differently for people physically, He provides the same for all spiritually. This is why the path to continue

giving thanks to Him includes walking by faith in Him alone **as our Savior** and not simply as our Creator-Preserver (as the national Thanksgiving Day proclamations may stress).

It is this grace which He displayed in the lives of His people when He delivered them from their slavery to Egypt (cf. Deuteronomy 8:14), and constantly displayed with His providence and deliverance throughout their history, which is the basis for the path of thanksgiving spoken of in verse 6 of our text: *So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in His ways and by fearing Him.* Thanking God is bound up in striving to live in obedience to His will. It is this grace fulfilled in the Person & Work of Jesus which places you on the path to giving thanks by *walking in His ways and by fearing Him.* Through this grace the Holy Spirit also brings you back on the path to giving thanks when you stray. He does this through His means of grace, Word and sacraments.

Wouldn't it be interesting if, instead of ungrateful grumbling and complaining, you responded with . . . "Well, when I went to worship I came to Jesus in humble repentance, my soul starving and thirsty for His forgiveness. He came to me in the absolution, declaring me His forgiven child, which He made me in my baptism! He conveyed His forgiveness through the Gospel message proclaimed as well as through His body and blood in the Lord's Supper! I left worship on the path of giving

thanks with a renewed desire to live in obedience to the LORD and serve my neighbor! Thank You, Jesus!" Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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