

Not Your Righteousness!
Deuteronomy 9:1-10:11
Newton Bible Church
November 3, 2019

As we return to the book of Deuteronomy this morning, we will begin by refreshing the context of the passage we will consider. Moses was with the children of Israel on the border of the promised land. The generation that had been denied access to the land had all perished and Moses in a series of three farewell addresses called the surviving generation and their children to accept and be faithful to the covenant that God had so generously bestowed upon them. Today's text is from the second address; which highlighted the stipulations of that covenant. In that address Moses identified the basic elements of Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord in chapters 5-11 and the specific stipulations for living in the promised land in chapters 12-26. The basic elements of that covenant relationship included:

- The Ten Commandments (5:1-33)
- The call to total commitment to the Lord (6:1-25)
- The call to separation from the gods of other nations (7:11-26)
- A warning against forgetting the Lord (8:1-20)
- Illustrations of Israel's rebellions in the past (9:1-10:11)
- An admonition to fear and love the Lord and obey His will (10:12-11:32)

Included in the warning not to forget the Lord was a specific warning that prosperity in the land would usher in the temptation to succumb to prideful self-sufficiency.

Deuteronomy 8:17 English Standard Version (ESV)

¹⁷ Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.'

Today's text contains a similar warning; that victory in battle would usher in the temptation to succumb to prideful self-righteousness. Please turn to Deuteronomy 9 and follow along as I read:

Deuteronomy 9:1-10:11 English Standard Version (ESV)

9 "Hear, O Israel: you are to cross over the Jordan today, to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, cities great and fortified up to heaven, ² a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you have heard it said, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?' ³ Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the Lord your God. He will destroy them and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the Lord has promised you.

⁴ "Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. ⁵ Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

⁶ “Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.⁷ Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. ⁸ Even at Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, and the Lord was so angry with you that he was ready to destroy you. ⁹ When I went up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the Lord made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. ¹⁰ And the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words that the Lord had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. ¹¹ And at the end of forty days and forty nights the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.¹² Then the Lord said to me, ‘Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you have brought from Egypt have acted corruptly. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them; they have made themselves a metal image.’

¹³ “Furthermore, the Lord said to me, ‘I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stubborn people. ¹⁴ Let me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven. And I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.’¹⁵ So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain was burning with fire. And the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. ¹⁶ And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the Lord your God. You had made yourselves a golden calf. You had turned aside quickly from the way that the Lord had commanded you. ¹⁷ So I took hold of the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. ¹⁸ Then I lay prostrate before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger. ¹⁹ For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the Lord bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me that time also. ²⁰ And the Lord was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him. And I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. ²¹ Then I took the sinful thing, the calf that you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very small, until it was as fine as dust. And I threw the dust of it into the brook that ran down from the mountain.

²² “At Taberah also, and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you provoked the Lord to wrath. ²³ And when the Lord sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, ‘Go up and take possession of the land that I have given you,’ then you rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God and did not believe him or obey his voice.²⁴ You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you.

²⁵ “So I lay prostrate before the Lord for these forty days and forty nights, because the Lord had said he would destroy you. ²⁶ And I prayed to the Lord, ‘O Lord God, do not destroy your people and your heritage, whom you have redeemed through your greatness, whom you have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.²⁷ Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness or their sin, ²⁸ lest the land from which you brought us say, “Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.” ²⁹ For they are your people and your heritage, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.’

10 “At that time the Lord said to me, ‘Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to me on the mountain and make an ark of wood. ²And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets that you broke, and you shall put them in the ark.’ ³So I made an ark of acacia wood, and cut two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain with the two tablets in my hand. ⁴And he wrote on the tablets, in the same writing as before, the Ten Commandments that the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And the Lord gave them to me. ⁵Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark that I had made. And there they are, as the Lord commanded me.”

⁶(The people of Israel journeyed from Beeroth Bene-jaakan^[a] to Moserah. There Aaron died, and there he was buried. And his son Eleazar ministered as priest in his place. ⁷From there they journeyed to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land with brooks of water. ⁸At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord to stand before the Lord to minister to him and to bless in his name, to this day. ⁹Therefore Levi has no portion or inheritance with his brothers. The Lord is his inheritance, as the Lord your God said to him.)

¹⁰“I myself stayed on the mountain, as at the first time, forty days and forty nights, and the Lord listened to me that time also. The Lord was unwilling to destroy you.¹¹ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise, go on your journey at the head of the people, so that they may go in and possess the land, which I swore to their fathers to give them.’

The first truth we note is that these were:

1. A people in need of grace (9:1-24)
 - To help them grasp this truth Moses reminded them of:
 - a. The danger of spiritual pride (1-6)
 - Moses began with the call, “Hear O Israel” – this call was a signal that whatever followed was of primary importance.
 - He continued with a statement; almost identical to the report of the spineless spies given years before – that the peoples they were about to face were greater and mightier than themselves, including the dreaded giants known as Anakim, but with this key difference: God promised to go before them as a consuming fire and annihilate this fearsome host.
 - The danger for them would arise when God kept this promise. They would be tempted to listen to their sin filled hearts and jump to the erroneous conclusion that the reason God had done this was because they were more righteous than the Canaanites. Nothing could be further from the truth! Moses quickly declared:
 - “Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess the land” (v. 5)
 - The human heart is quick to find someone that is a little bit worse in order to justify its spiritual pride. Taken to its extreme it concludes that God is lucky to have them on His side. This was the danger the Israelites were about to face.
 - Moses declared the two real reasons God was about to destroy the Canaanite hosts:
 - It was divine judgment of the wickedness of these pagan nations. Their idolatry, including child sacrifice, and the fertility cults associated with that idolatry, were so vile that they could no longer be tolerated. It was the fullness of the

wickedness of the nations, not the righteousness of the Israelites that prompted God to act.

- It was also divine fulfillment of the promises God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was God's faithfulness to His promises, not the righteousness of the Israelites that motivated God's actions.
- That Israel was the beneficiary of these divine actions was pure grace. In order to deflate this false pride in advance, Moses pointedly declared, "the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people." To drive the point home Moses turned to multiple:
 - b. Reminders of spiritual rebellion (7-24)
 - Moses spent the most time reminding the Israelites of the ultimate example of their spiritual rebellion; the one that took place at the exact time they were receiving the covenant. That rebellion occurred at:
 - i. Mount Horeb: we know the story of how the Israelites got tired of waiting for Moses to come down from his meeting with God and how Aaron cooperated with them in the creation of an idol that they were worshiping with horrific pagan excesses while the visible presence of God was just a few feet away.
 - The severity of that rebellion was reflected in multiple ways:
 - God's revelation of this rebellion to Moses while he was still on the mountain contained these chilling words: "**your people** who **you brought** from Egypt have acted corruptly." God was in essence declaring that covenant null and void.
 - God's statement that He was ready to destroy this entire generation of Israelites and start over with Moses' family reveals how seriously God takes spiritual rebellion.
 - Moses' destruction of the tablets of the covenant was a public declaration that the covenant had been obliterated.
 - Moses fear of God's judgment struck particularly close to home because the LORD was so angry that He was ready to destroy his brother Aaron.
 - The spiritual rebellion of these Israelites seems unthinkable while they could actually see the visible presence of God. It reveals how utterly wicked and prone to rebellion our hearts are apart from the control of the Holy Spirit.
 - Moses augmented these reminders with a list of additional places the Israelites had rebelled. These references are not in chronological order, but reflect ascending levels of rebellion, the final example coming closest to the rebellion at Mount Horeb. These places were:
 - ii. Taberah: this example of rebellion was recorded in Numbers:

Numbers 11:1-3 English Standard Version (ESV)

11 And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. ²Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down. ³So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them.

- This occurred a mere three days journey from Mount Horeb. This particular rebellion was manifested in complaining.
- They didn't like the circumstances God had allowed into their lives and went vocal. God recognized such complaining as spiritual rebellion and acted swiftly and decisively to judge it.

iii. Massah: this example of rebellion was recorded in Exodus:

Exodus 17:1-2, 5-7 English Standard Version (ESV)

17 All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" . . . ⁵And the Lord said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

- Here, rebellion escalated from complaining to declaring that God was not doing what He said He would do.
- They were in fact questioning God's faithfulness to His promises. Their physical need was met (that was grace) but God's faithfulness in the face of questioning that faithfulness was grace upon grace!

iv. Kibroth-hattaavah: this example of rebellion was recorded in Numbers:

Numbers 11:4 English Standard Version (ESV)

⁴Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh that we had meat to eat!

Numbers 11:31, 33-34 English Standard Version (ESV)

³¹Then a wind from the Lord sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, around the camp, and about two cubits above the ground. . . ³³While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck down the people with a very great plague. ³⁴Therefore the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had the craving.

- Here, rebellion escalated from questioning God's faithfulness to declaring that God's provision was neither sufficient nor satisfying.
- Though God seemed to give in to their cravings, He utilized their very request to bring judgment upon that rebellion. The escalation of rebellion continued.

v. Kadesh-barnea: this example of rebellion was recorded in Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 1:24-26 English Standard Version (ESV)

²⁴And they turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshcol and spied it out. ²⁵And they took in their hands some of the fruit of the land and brought it down to us, and brought us word again and said, 'It is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us.'

²⁶"Yet you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God.

- Here, rebellion escalated from rejection of God’s provision to disobedience of a direct command.
 - Outright disobedience is only a step removed from the rejection of God and exaltation of self that was demonstrated at Mount Horeb.
- Moses cited these examples to drive home the foolishness of spiritual pride. These people (and we) were people desperately in need of grace. Moses had appropriated this truth personally as we next see:
- 2. An intercessor captured by grace (9:25-29)
 - Moses had not always been such a man. His pride filled attempt to take leadership of the Israelite people resulted in fleeing the wrath of Pharaoh and decades in the Midianite wilderness. In those years and in the process of obeying God’s call to lead Israel out of bondage, Moses had become:
 - a. A man seasoned by grace (we see the evidence of this in our text)
 - i. The test is found in verses 13-14. The test came in the form of an offer to make of Moses a nation mightier and greater than Israel. But in order to do so God would have to destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven. If anyone ever was tempted to succumb to spiritual pride it was Moses in that moment!
 - ii. The result of this test is found in verse 26 – Moses refused to take the bait, instead reminding God that Israel was God’s people whom He had redeemed through His great and mighty hand. Without a shred of pride, Moses staked his claim with this rebellious people and pleaded with God to not give them what they deserved. We see this in:
 - b. A prayer shaped by grace (26-29)
 - Moses’ prayer is an example of the effective intercession of a person who has been captured by grace. That type of prayer has very specific characteristics. A prayer shaped by grace is:
 - i. Submissive: Moses’ total subjection to God’s will was expressed both in posture and language. He fell before the LORD in the attitude of a surrendered servant. The term he used, “Sovereign LORD,” affirmed God’s complete lordship and unrivalled dominion. Grace shaped intercession begins by confessing God’s right to act as He wishes in the lives of those for whom one is praying.
 - ii. Persistent: Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights in God’s presence beseeching the LORD to change His mind about the extermination of the disobedient rebels. They didn’t deserve such persistent prayer, but the man transformed by grace gave it anyway.
 - iii. Sacrificial: Moses refused to eat until he had done his utmost for the needy people. The people had been casual about their sin, but Moses did not take it lightly. This sacrifice was because of all the sin they had committed, not solely because they were about to lose their lives.
 - iv. Specific: Although content to do God’s will, Moses came to the LORD with a bold and definite request. God had said “Let Me alone,” but Moses was not willing to leave God alone on this matter. Too much was at stake. Moses asked for something specific and God was pleased to grant it to him.

- v. Compassionate: Moses was naturally concerned about the people as a whole, but he was particularly distressed about his sinful brother, Aaron. Moses must have been overwhelmed with sorrow that his own brother could be so unreliable, disloyal, disobedient, cowardly, and dishonest. Moses still prayed for him. Only a person transformed by grace prays this way!
 - vi. Comprehensive: Moses made his request on the basis of God's character. Moses' plea was based in the fact that God's glory was at stake. Moses genuinely feared that pagan nations would be misled if God visited His people with the judgment they deserved.
 - The grace filled prayer of a man transformed by grace was incredibly effective. Moses did more for the people by praying for them than he could have done by reasoning with them. At the end of the intercession, God renewed the covenant with His disobedient people. That is because He is:
3. A God who lavishes grace (10:1-11)
- God's response to Moses' prayer was totally:
 - a. God's undeserved grace (1-9)
 - We see this exhibited in three specific realms:
 - i. God's grace to Israel (1-5)
 - Israel did not deserve a second chance. Yet God's instructions to Moses indicated that He was entering into covenant with the people once again.
 - We have no record of Israel repenting; all we have record of is Moses' humble intercession. This was pure undeserved grace!
 - Israel also did not deserve to reenter the covenant on the same conditions. Moses went to great pains to assure them that the conditions of the original and the renewed covenant were exactly the same. This too was totally undeserved!
 - ii. God's grace to Aaron's family (6)
 - Aaron had sinned and was disqualified to be a spiritual leader. Not only was he allowed to live on, he was allowed to serve as High Priest. In fact, he continued as High Priest until his death.
 - The covenant stipulations that God had given included the words that God is a jealous God who would punish "the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations." Yet in God's undeserved grace, the sins of Aaron were not visited upon his children - Eleazer, his son, succeeded him as priest. Aaron and his family received undeserved favor.
 - iii. God's grace to the tribe of Levi (7-9)
 - God knew that His people would easily lose their spiritual and moral values, so a particular tribe was set apart to become God's ministers to them and help them retain fellowship with God.
 - Anyone who knows the stories of Jacob's sons knows that Levi was no bastion of righteousness. That his descendants were accorded this incredible privilege is nothing less than undeserved grace.
 - That the Lord Himself undertook to be these Levites special inheritance was grace upon grace. The Levites were the recipients of undeserved grace.

- God's response to Moses' prayer also reflected:
- b. God's sovereign grace (10-11)
- Moses informed the people that he had engaged in fervent intercession on their behalf for 40 days and 40 nights and that the LORD had listened. But then we learn that this grace was not the product of having His arm twisted.
 - The reason given for the grace lavished upon all of them was that "the LORD was unwilling to destroy you." In other words, it was God's decision all along.
 - This is sovereign grace; undeserved favor lavished out upon totally undeserving recipients simply because God in His infinite wisdom chooses to do so.
 - Is this not what we who have trusted in Christ alone have received? We who were spiritually dead and could not even reach out to Him have been made alive by the Spirit and have received grace upon grace in Him.
 - Have you experienced this grace? If you have not and you have recognized today that you are just as rebellious as those Israelites and just as desperately in need of grace it is because the Spirit is stirring life in you – don't resist and don't delay – embrace your Savior today by trusting in nothing you have ever done and trusting in Him and His life giving sacrifice on your behalf alone.

An ancient Native American, after living many years in sin, was led to Christ by a missionary. Friends asked him to explain the change in his life. Reaching down, he picked up a little worm and placed it on a pile of leaves. Then, touching a match to the leaves, he watched them smolder and burst into flames. As the flames worked their way up to the center where the worm lay, the old chief suddenly plunged his hand into the center of the burning pile and snatched out the worm. Holding the worm gently in his hand, he gave his testimony to the grace of God: "Me . . . that worm!"

If you have experienced that grace, I plead with you today, heed the warning to the Israelites of the danger of spiritual pride. May God help us to always remember the truths expressed in the second verse of Augustus Toplady's Rock of Ages:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
 Simply to the cross I cling.
 Naked come to You for dress,
 Helpless look to You for grace.
 Foul I to the fountain fly,
 Wash me Savior or I die.
 All my works could not atone,
 You must save and You alone.

Let us pray.