

Sermon Series: Deuteronomy Lessons

February 2, 2014

Title: The Test of Plenty

Text: Deuteronomy 8:6-18

Summary: Life presents us with 2 tests: the Test of Want and the Test of Plenty. The second test is always the harder of the two. Moses shows us how to be sure to pass the Test of Plenty.

The Two Tests

"The Choke"

Houston faced Buffalo in an NFL wildcard game at Buffalo's Rich Stadium on January 3, 1993. For the first half of the game it made no matter that Buffalo was playing at home: the score at halftime was 28-3 Houston. 1:41 into the 3rd quarter and a Frank Reich interception made the score 35-3.

Things were so bad for the Buffalo Bills that the Houston radio announcer said: "The lights are on here at Rich Stadium, they've been on since this morning, you could pretty much turn them out on the Bills right now."

Then the Bills started a comeback -- or, The Comeback. By late in the 4th quarter they had fought their way to a 38-35 lead. Houston kicked a field goal to send the game into overtime.

Houston won the coin toss, but quarterback Warren Moon threw a pick that turned into the game-winning field goal for the Bills. Final score: 41-38.

Kicker Steve Christie's kicking shoe made it to the NFL Hall of Fame. Meanwhile, Houston fired both its defensive coordinator and defensive backs coach the day after the stunning loss. In Houston the game became known as "The Choke."

Which is harder?

So which is harder: to be ahead or behind? Is it harder to have to claw your way out of a hole, or is it harder to keep a lead?

Is it harder to deal with adversity? Or is it harder to deal with success?

The fact is that people often take the hardest falls not when they're struggling to get ahead, but when they've reached the pinnacle of their fame and careers.

And the same is true for you and me. Jesus said, "To whom much is given, much is required." The bigger test is most often not the Test of Want, but the Test of Plenty.

The Two Tests:

As Moses prepares his people for their entrance into the Promised Land, he reminds them of the reality of the Two Tests. He commands them to look back at the years of hardship and testing in the long journey through the desert. He reminds them of the lessons they learned during that time of neediness.

But then Moses changes his focus to the second test: the test of living in the prosperity of the Promised Land.

God has brought them all this way so that they might live, increase, enter and possess the land He is giving to them. But they will have to learn to possess the land and its riches without allowing the land to possess them!

The Good Land

A land of plenty:

Moses frames the test of living in prosperity by describing for them the Promised Land.

It is a well-watered land, a striking contrast to the interminable desert of the past 40 years:

Deuteronomy 8:7 NIV

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills;

It is a land filled with food-bearing plants and trees:

Deuteronomy 8:8-9 NIV

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;

And it is a land rich in minerals:

Deuteronomy 8:9b NIV

a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

Moses goes out of his way to force the contrast with the desert experience they know so well:

Deuteronomy 8:15-16 NIV

He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.

Soon, the desert will be behind them, with its snakes and scorpions and its dry and thirsty land. They are about to enter the Land of Plenty.

Eden revisited:

Moses' description of the Promised Land evokes another Land of Plenty -- the Garden of Eden. The description of the Garden of Eden in Genesis begins with its bountiful sources of water:

Genesis 2:5-6 NIV

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.

Genesis 2:10 NIV

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.

The comparison with the Garden of Eden continues with the placing of people in this bountiful space, just as God is about to place His people in the Land of Plenty.

Genesis 2:8a NIV

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

The Garden of Eden was a place filled with food-bearing trees, just like the Land of Plenty that awaits Israel:

Genesis 2:8b-9a NIV

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

Finally, the Garden of Eden was rich in mineral wealth, just like the future Land of Plenty of the Israelites:

Genesis 2:11-12 NIV

The name of the first [river] is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.)

The Promised Land -- the Land of Plenty -- is nothing less than a new Garden of Eden where humans and God can dwell together under the Creator's rule.

The Test of Plenty

The Eden Test:

There is one more point of comparison between the Land of Plenty and the Garden of Eden: both involved what we might call "The Test of Plenty."

We read in Genesis 2 that God presented Adam and Eve with a test to see if they would obey His command:

Genesis 2:9b NIV

In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:16-17 NIV

And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

The Garden of Eden was a place of plenty, a place of freedom to "eat from any tree in the garden," save one. It was a place of Life and Increase, to be Entered and Possessed. But it was also a place with a *command*. Adam and Eve's failure to keep that one command cost them everything -- the loss of life in the garden, the loss of relationship and fellowship with their Creator, the loss of trust and love between themselves, the loss of Life as it was meant to be.

Such are the stakes when we face the Test of Plenty.

The Test of Plenty:

Moses wants his people to understand that they are now in the place as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They are now coming into a land that is well-watered, filled with food, and rich in resources. The big question is how they will respond.

Deuteronomy 8:11-14 NIV

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord 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 the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18 NIV

You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

There is it: the Test of Plenty. Will they *forget* God's rule? Will they take credit for the abundant food and water, silver and gold, that comes their way? Will they say: "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me"?

That, after all was the great sin of Adam and Eve. They were tempted to make themselves little gods over the Garden. They "forgot" the one command God had given them, and decided to be autonomous, making up their own rules, thank you very much.

Now Israel faces the same test, the Test of Plenty. When the good times roll, will she remain humble and obedient, or will she become inflated with her own sense of importance? Will she remain faithful to God's covenant with her, or will she declare "independence" from God and go her own way?

This is the Test of Plenty.

Passing the Test:

The Test of Want is usually pretty straight-forward. Not so the Test of Plenty. So what do we need to do to pass this more difficult test?

As Moses tells the people, it all starts with remembering/not forgetting. In other words, it all starts inside us. How did Houston blow a 35-3 lead? It wasn't because all of their starters got hurt. It wasn't because they huddled together and decided to throw the game. It was much more subtle than that. Somehow, they began to "forget" about competing and began to sit on their lead. They stopped remembering that every single play, every run, every pass, mattered. They let the Bills get back into the game. And in so doing, they fell victim to what has gone down in NFL history as The Comeback, and what has gone down in Houston history as The Choke.

The second warning Moses gives is all about pride: **"then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Deut. 8:14 NIV)**

As soon as we forget God, we fill in the blank with ourselves. That was the great sin of Adam and Eve. And that is the great sin in the Land of Plenty.

Some of us find ourselves in the Land of Want, dreaming of some day coming into the Land of Plenty. If that is your situation, take time to remember that the Land of Plenty will bring an even greater test -- the Test of Plenty. How you handle the little you have now will determine how you handle greater blessings in the future.

Others of us find ourselves in the Land of Plenty. Dreams have come true. The checkbook balance is no longer a source of endless anxiety. Sure, we face uncertainties in the future, but they aren't half a paycheck away. If that is your situation, you are already facing the Test of Plenty. Every day you will be tempted to say,

**"My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."
(Deut. 8:17 NIV)**

Every day you will be tempted to forget the God who brought you through the tough times into this time of blessing. Every day you will be tempted to forget that He is King and you are His subject.

So make every day a day of passing the Test of Plenty. Every day, just do what Moses commanded his people:

Deuteronomy 8:10 NIV

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

Do this and you will always pass the Test of Plenty!