

## **Deuteronomy 8: 11-20**

**First Presbyterian Church**

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There is no other way to say it. This morning we are going to talk about money. I know - if I had announced the sermon ahead of time you would have skipped church this morning. We're not uncomfortable with the idea of money. In fact we like the idea of money. We're not uncomfortable with having money, in fact we're more comfortable when we have money. We're not uncomfortable using money. We enjoy all the good things money enables us to have. We're not uncomfortable earning money or negotiating for a higher salary. We're not even uncomfortable talking about good investments and deals that worked out well for us financially. But when the subject of the sermon on Sunday morning is money, well then we're uncomfortable. And in a way I find that amusing since money was one of Jesus' favorite and frequent topics.

For several weeks now the sermons have been dealing with the subject of conflict and how we as Christians are to deal with the conflicts in our lives. Well, nothing causes more stress and conflict in life than money. Divorces happen because of money. Friendships are broken over money. Much of the stress in our lives has as its root cause money - making it, saving it, spending it. Business partners come to a parting of the ways because of money. Brothers and sisters are often estranged from one another over financial matters.

In our text for this morning Moses is giving his farewell address to the people of Israel. He has brought them out of Egypt and across the desert. He has been their leader for some 40 years. And now they stand perched

just outside of the land promised to them by God. But Moses has been told by God that he will not enter the land with his people. He can only stand on a mountain top and look down on the land that had been their goal for so long. And when Moses thinks of the days and years ahead of the people he knows that life will certainly be easier for them than it has been in the desert. They left Egypt in haste taking almost nothing with them. And life in the wilderness was difficult to say the least. They had very little to eat, they lived in makeshift tents and out under the open sky. They had few possessions because their constant movement made too much stuff a real and literal burden.

And Moses' word to the people is don't forget the Lord when life is good. During their 40 year trek they had literally had to depend on God for each days food. God was a present reality in the cloud and pillar of smoke that accompanied them. But Moses knew how easy it would be when the difficulties were past to loosen their grip on God's presence. Before long they would take the good things of life for granted. Worse than that they would take them as their due. They would forget to thank God for all that they had. And then they would begin to take the credit for what they had. "I worked hard and look what I have to show for it". They would eventually get to a place where they forgot that God had anything to do with their prosperity. God would be the one who got them through the tough times but who had little to do or say in the present moment. God would become a part of their history but not part of their present.

Moses pictures for the people a time when they will have more than enough to eat, a rich variety of foods to choose from, and larger quantities than their health demands. He pictures a time when they will have large permanent homes to live in filled with fine things. He pictures a time when

their business will prosper and their wealth will increase. A time when they will have more of everything than they need or can use.

One of the things I hope we can see in this passage is that wealth is not a bad thing. God blesses some with great wealth and all of the good things of life. And we are some of the people so blessed. I know - your first response is that you aren't wealthy. Lets do a little math. Try to figure out in round numbers what the clothes you are wearing today cost you. Don't forget your shoes and the purse you are carrying. Now figure out the dollar value of the jewelry you are wearing - rings, watches, earrings, necklaces, bracelets. Add those two numbers together. Add to that the amount of cash in your wallet at this moment. Now add the price you paid for the glasses you are wearing, a hearing aid, or the medicines you took this morning. Don't bother with things like haircuts, makeup, perms, or manicures that add to who you are today. But do add the price of the gas that got you here today and a portion of the price of the car you drive. Whatever figure you came up with is probably more than the annual wage of about half of the world. And it is just what it took to get you here this morning. It doesn't include the house you own, the full value of your vehicles, a vacation home, what you have in savings of one kind or another and the insurance that helps to pay your expenses. We are wealthy. God has richly blessed us. We have all had those times of wandering through the wilderness wondering if we would really make it. But we did and we are here today by God's grace alone.

But our wealth isn't just what can be measured in dollars and cents. We live in a free nation where we have a say in our government. We have access to the finest educational system in the world. We benefit from the highest levels of medical technology. We can choose our vocation and our mate. If ancient Israel thought they had found the promised land we have

exceeded their wildest dreams. We are wealthy by any standard.

And immediately two questions come to mind. Why would God choose to bless us so abundantly, and what did Moses mean when he warned the people (us included) not to forget God in our prosperity?

The Old Testament is the story of God's promise of blessing being worked out in the life of one nation. It is often taken to be a story of privilege as though God loved the Israelites more than the other people on earth at the time. But that is a misreading of the text. God blessed Israel so that they might be an example to the rest of the world. So that in their life others would see the love of God. But God also blessed Israel so that they might be a blessing to the rest of the world. They were to use the resources at their disposal to overcome the evil in the world. Their abundance was given so that they might be equipped to redeem the world.

Wealth becomes a liability when we squander it on our own pleasures. God has given us abundance, education, freedom, health, so that we can reach out into the world to resist the evil that would destroy lives. God gives us wealth and trusts that we will use it wisely for ourselves and for others.

Moses wasn't just saying that the people would forget to thank God for all that they had received. To forget God is to fail to keep the commandments, the ordinances and the statutes. To forget God in the midst of prosperity is to trust in the abundance of riches rather than in the words of God.

Some of the ordinances that Moses was referring to were concerned with giving. Giving to the poor, to widows and orphans, to the upkeep of the temple, to the stranger and alien in the land, to those who were ill. Giving was not voluntary. It was required of every Jew. And the amount of giving was not left for the individual to decide. They believed that God expected

ten percent of everything they had. Giving was at the heart of their religion and their faith. Giving was a way of remembering the God who had given them so much. To forget God was to fail to give some of their wealth to the purposes of redemption.

I truly believe that giving begins not with dollars and cents but in the heart. And it begins when we realize how wealthy we truly are.

Let us pray.