

THE FIGHT AGAINST THE ENEMY WITHIN!

Many of you know that my wife and I enjoy the movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life.” The movie came out in 1946—just a year after World War II ended. Those of you familiar with the movie know that the war is referred to quite a bit in the movie. I’m not going to go through all the examples, but here are a couple of prominent ones. George Bailey—the main character—couldn’t enlist and go overseas to fight because of his bad ear. His brother Harry, on the other hand, became a famous fighter pilot during the war.

Why do I bring all this up? Because in the movie, the country **reacted the same way** to news about victories that were won during the war. It says of George Bailey: “Like everybody else on VE Day, he wept and prayed. On VJ Day, he wept and prayed again.”

But the reaction to Wednesday’s news was **not the same** for everybody, was it? There was not a **unified, bringing-everyone-together** kind of reaction, was there?

Were there tears of joy? Yes—but there were also tears **of sorrow!**

Were there sighs of relief? Yes—but there were also **waves of fear!**

My guess is that I’m not the only one who spent some of **Wednesday morning** “processing” the results of the election. Did I shed tears of joy? Not quite—but I was **extremely thankful**—and still am!

But...I am also **very concerned**. Why? Because **the war** isn’t over, is it? Please know that “the war” I’m referring to is not a **physical one** between two **political** parties. It is a **spiritual war** against **spiritual wickedness**. God through Paul teaches us that truth in **Ephesians 6:12** “For we **wrestle not against flesh and blood**, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against **spiritual wickedness** in high places.”

When will this battle between God and Satan—between good and evil—**be over**? Not for at least **1007** years! Some of you might be thinking ‘That’s kind of a **strange number**, Pastor. **Where** did you get that from?’ But others of you know from the Bible that that is actually **a very accurate** number. **Why?** Because the Tribulation is 7 years—and Satan is bound for 1000 years **after** the Tribulation and then is released for a short time. Then—and only then—is Satan **once and for all defeated** and thrown into the lake of fire where he will be “tormented day and night for ever and ever” the Bible says in Revelation 20:10. That’s where the 1007 years comes from—and that period **hasn’t even started** yet!

So...we have to **keep fighting** because Satan is still “alive and well on planet earth.” But... Satan isn’t the only enemy we fight against! We also have “an enemy within” that we are **at war** with. And **that fight**—against the enemy within—is the one that God impressed upon my heart for us to look at this morning.

Take your Bibles and turn to Deuteronomy 8:1-2. Here—in a nutshell—is the context.

--God had used Moses to lead the people out of Egypt

--Because of their disobedience and unbelief, they were not allowed to go into the Promised Land right away. Instead, God kept them in the wilderness **for 40 years** until the people who had complained against God...and doubted Him...and rebelled against Him—literally “died off.”

--Moses, too, had disobeyed God in such a way that he would not be going into the Promised Land either. So here they are—on the verge of entering the Promised Land—and God (through Moses) is giving them some “last minute” instructions, reminders, and warnings.

So **why** are we looking at Moses and the nation of Israel this morning? In the way of a disclaimer, I don’t believe **America** has replaced Israel as God’s chosen nation. And I don’t believe **that the church**—meaning true blood-bought, born-again believers—has replaced Israel either! But...how God dealt with His people during the time of Moses does give us insight as to **how He deals with people** in general. And some of those general principles provide important truths for us—post election—in 2024.

First, let’s consider... **1. What God desires**

What was God’s desire for His people? We just read it, didn’t we? Notice again what it says in vs 1. He wanted their obedience, didn’t He?

--End of vs 2 "...to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no."

--Now vs 6.

--Vs 11.

--Vs 20. You'll perish—meaning "be destroyed"—just like the nations I'm driving out "because ye will not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God."

Has God changed? **No**; He has not! Does God still **desire obedience** from His children? Yes; He does! **John 14:15** "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

I John 5:3 "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous." In other words, they are not a grief or a burden to us. We **want to do them** because we love Him!

When does God desire obedience? All the time, right?

--We must obey God when times **are good**—but we also must obey Him when times **are bad**! And sometimes—according vs 2—God puts us in positions to "humble" us and see if we are going to obey or not!

What about you? Some people are more serious about obeying and seeking God when **things are bad**, but don't think it is important when **things are good**! What a strange way to think! And yet, that is **the nature** of our nature! We'll come back to this thought of not obeying during good times in a little bit.

Next, let's consider... **2. What God disdains**

We know God **desires** obedience, but what does He **dislike**—besides disobedience? What does God despise and disdain? It's not a mystery, is it? Just as God doesn't make us wonder what He **desires**; He doesn't "leave us in the dark" about what He **disapproves of**. And these things in particular are what I'm fearful of in the next four years—**if we have that much time**! 'Pastor, aren't you being kind of doomsday sounding?' Maybe, but "thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

Drop down to verse 7 and follow along as I read vss 7-9. When God led Moses to pronounce and write these words, **prosperity** was just across the river, wasn't it? The land that God had brought them to would be just as Moses promised. And what a land it would be! Vs 9 says there would be no lack of food—or anything!

But with **prosperity** comes a warning—directly from God! What were they warned to be careful about?

A. Forgetfulness

God despises—He disapproves of and disdains—forgetfulness. I'm obviously not talking about the kind of forgetfulness that happens due to age. I'm talking about forgetfulness in the sense **of ingratitude**.

We see that in vs 10. "When thou hast eaten and are full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God..." To "bless" means to express gratitude—and sometimes carries the idea of kneeling in reverence and worship. **Why** were they to express gratitude and praise and worship to God? "For the good land which He hath given them."

The warning continues in vs 11. "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which I command thee this day:"

Here we have what I alluded to earlier: prosperity sometimes brings about a complacency—a lackadaisical attitude—when it comes to obeying God!

It happened to the nation of Israel—and I'm afraid it will happen to us! Prosperity for America may not be **across the river**, but it is certainly a possibility—and may be "right around the corner!" Will a new "golden age" for America **really be ushered** in in 2025? We don't know for sure, do we, but many believe that it will. "Drill, baby drill"—and "frack, baby frack"—happened **once before under** President Trump...and brought gas prices down...and I'm cautiously optimistic that it will happen again!

But with prosperity comes the danger that we, too, will **enjoy** what God gives and be **full** of what God gives—and **then forget God**! If that doesn't show the depravity of the human heart—even after we are saved and the Holy Spirit takes up residence—I don't know what does! So one of the "enemies" within is forgetfulness—a lack of gratitude to God for what He gives and what He has done.

Forgetfulness isn't the only thing God warns us about if—or when—prosperity comes. God through Moses also warned them—and warns us—about... B. Pride

Please follow along as I read verses 12-14. Here we have it again, don't we? God prospers—and we forget. To have a “lifted up heart” means to be proud.

Now vs 15-16. They had forgotten God's protection—and provision—in the wilderness. Not only did they forget God, they also began to think within their hearts **that they were the source** of their power and wealth. We see that in vs 17-18.

Quite a picture, isn't it? God frees them from the bondage of Egypt, protects and provides them through for 40 years in the wilderness, brings them to the Promised land where they will be given cities and houses that they didn't build...and wells that they didn't dig...and vineyards and trees that they didn't plant (Deut 6:10-11). And their response? “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.”

Can that attitude creep into our lives? It can, can't it? Do you see now why I'm referring to these things as “the enemy within?”

So far, we've noted God's desire for obedience—and His disdain for ingratitude and pride.

Lastly, let's consider... **3. What God declares about victory**

Now please turn a page or two to chapter 9. Notice what it says in vs 1-6. What I want to do now is work our way through these verses and see three truths God wants us to understand about victories in battle.

First... A. God is the “behind-the-scenes” fighter

--Vs 3 “Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God **is He which goeth before thee...**”

--“**He** shall destroy them, and **He** shall bring them down...”

And yet, **they were the ones** who would drive them out! “...**so shalt thou** drive them out, and destroy them quickly.” **Who** drove them out? **God**—through God's people!

--Can I fully explain that? No; and you probably can't either!

But—as mentioned last week—that's why even though **God is the One** who “removeth kings, and setteth up kings,” we **still had to vote!** Now verse 4. Here we again see God as the “behind-the-scenes” fighter.

--Vs 4 “Speak not thou in thine heart, after that **the LORD thy God hath cast them** out before thee...”

--end of the vs “**the LORD doth drive them** out from before thee.”

In the middle of vs 5, we have nearly the exact same phrase: “**the LORD thy God doth drive them** out from before thee....”

--Vs 6 “Understand therefore, that **the LORD thy God giveth** thee...”

In vs 3 God says “**Understand** therefore”—and He says it again here. What are we supposed to **understand?** That God is the One who wins battles!

Was a battle won on Tuesday? I believe there was! But...God made it happen—and He deserves the credit and praise!

That's not the only declaration God makes in these verses, though. A second one is this:

B. God works in spite of His people

There's a difference, isn't there, between God doing something **because** of His people—and God doing something **in spite of** them! Was God “rewarding” the nation of Israel because they were good...and obedient...and upright? No; He wasn't—and He made sure they understood that!

--Vs 4 “**Speak not thou in thine heart**”—don't entertain this thought and say to yourself: “**For my righteousness** the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land...”

--Vs 5 “**Not for thy righteousness**, or for the uprightness of thine heart...”

--Vs 6 “...the LORD thy God **giveth thee not** this good land to possess it **for thy righteousness**; for thou art a stiff-necked people.”

--End of vs 7 “...ye have **been rebellious** against the LORD.”

The message is clear! I said it once, but here it is again—God was **not rewarding** His people with entrance into the **Promised Land** because they were good and deserved it! And God did not **allow victory** on election day for what we would consider the more “Biblically aligned” candidate because God’s people are so good and upright!

It was not for **our righteousness**; it was not for **our goodness or uprightness** at all! God was merciful to us—and answered prayer—not **because** of us, but **in spite of** us!

We need to **guard ourselves** against the mindset that God **does good** because **we are** good! God does good because **He is good**—and merciful! **Lamentations 3:22-23** “It is of the **Lord's mercies** that we are not consumed, because **His compassions fail not**. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”

There’s another application, though, isn’t there? To use the words of verse 4, “Speak not thou in thine heart” that you are going to enter heaven because of **your** righteousness. Why? Because **Isaiah 64:6** says “our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” ...and **Romans 3:10** says, “There is no righteousness, no, not one” and **Titus 3:5** says, “**Not by works of righteousness which we have done**, but according to **His mercy** He saved us...”

What about you? I’m **not a mind-reader**, but I do know this about every one of you: You are either **counting on your own righteousness**—meaning your own goodness to get into heaven—or you are counting on **God’s mercy**. There is no “in between”—it’s one or the other! I John 5:12, right? You either have the Son—and have eternal life—or you don’t have Him—and don’t have life!

First, God is the “behind-the-scenes” fighter. Second, God works in spite of His people.

Third... C. God works against the wicked

We see that truth in the end of vs 4 “...but for **the wickedness of these nations** the LORD doth drive them out from before thee.”

--We also see it in the middle of vs 5 “...but for **the wickedness of these nations** the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee...”

What did those **nations do** that made them so wicked? They practiced homosexuality...and worshipped idols... and offered children as sacrifices to their false gods! Pretty easy to see the parallels, isn’t it? For the sake of time—and since we talked about some of these things last week—I’ll let you connect the dots on your own...if you haven’t already done so!

One more thought from “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Near the end of the movie, Clarence says to George: “You’ve been given a great gift, George: A chance to see what the world would be like without you.”

We, too, as God’s people, have been given a great gift. Whether you realize it or not, our freedom of speech and freedom of religion were under attack—and slowly being taken away. I have no doubt that that attack would have intensified if the election had gone the other way.

So we have been given a reprieve...a break...a pause. President-elect Trump was **given a mandate** from the American people—but I believe God’s children were **given mercy** from God!

What are we going to do with that gift?

I’m obviously thankful for that gift—but I’m also concerned.

--Are we going to **get full and forget God** like the nation of Israel did?

--Are we going to **become proud and wrongly believe** that God blessed us because we are good?

--Are we going to **take credit for what God did** and believe that we brought prosperity upon ourselves?

--Are we going to **trust in—and give praise to—a president** instead of God?

As we close, I want you to notice the verses I have on your handout from **II Kings 17:33 and 41** “³³**They feared the Lord, and served their own gods**, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence.

⁴¹**So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images,”**

To “fear” the Lord in these verses means that they worshipped God—but only outwardly. Their hearts were bound to their idols—not God. Can that happen to us? Can we have an outward worship of God—but have our hearts be far away? Yes—because we have an enemy within!

So what would God have us do in light of what we’ve heard?

1. First, work on cultivating an attitude of gratitude. That’s a good thing to be thinking about during the Thanksgiving season, isn’t it?

2. Second, work on fighting against the attitude of complacency. We have a job to do—and it is not to make America **great** again! It is to make America **godly** again!

--America will not become godly if we as individuals are not godly!

--And America will not become godly if we don’t point people to God! Just because a person has what you and I consider the right political view doesn’t mean they have the right view of Jesus!

3. Lastly—but most importantly—please remember what I said earlier about trusting in your own righteousness—your own goodness—to get into heaven. Entrance into heaven—forgiveness of sins—is not based on what we do.

It is based on what Jesus did on the cross when He died for your sins! But you need to have Him—not just know about Him! Do **you** have the Son?

I John 5:12 “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”