

The Bounteous Hand Of God.

Text: Deut 8:6-18

1) How it has again blessed us

Suggested Hymns:

2) How we may keep its blessing

563, 568, 298ELHBT40, 560, 566

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Deuteronomy 8:6-18, ⁶ *“Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.* ⁷ *“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; ⁸ “a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹ “a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.*

¹⁰ *“When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.*

¹¹ *Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, ¹² “lest -- when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; ¹³ “and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; ¹⁴ “when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; ¹⁵ “who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; ¹⁶ “who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end -- ¹⁷ “then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’*

¹⁸ *“And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are celebrating our Harvest Thanksgiving festival where we offer our thanks and praise to God at the close of the harvest. We thank God, not only for the harvest of the land but also for all the other blessings we receive such as employment, pensions and other government assistance.

In the Old Testament such harvest festivals were commanded by God. The children of Israel were commanded to bring in the first sheaves at the beginning of the harvest during the Passover Festival. This occurred at about the end of March or the beginning of April. It was a thank-offering.

We read in Leviticus 23:10-14, ¹⁰ *“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. ... And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. ... It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.*

However, the principal Harvest Festival was celebrated fifty days later, on Pentecost Day, also called the *Feast of Harvest*.¹ This was the season of the year when the grain, especially the wheat, was harvested and an offering of the new crop, was presented to the Lord.

We read in Leviticus 23:16-17, ¹⁶ *‘Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.* ¹⁷ *‘You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD.* That was a day of great joy on which also a free-will offering was brought into the sanctuary.

We read in Deuteronomy 16:10-11 ¹⁰ *“Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you.* ¹¹ *“You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the*

stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. Everybody in the household rejoiced and thanked God.

The third great festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, was held in the autumn of the year, after the wine and olive harvest, and was the *Thanksgiving Festival* of the Israelites.

In all of these thanksgiving festivals we note that the people gave to the Lord either the first-fruits of their crops, or an animal without blemish. In other words, they gave their very best.

In the New Testament, God has commanded no special days of worship or festival days. The choice of such days and festivities is left to us. But Christians are always grateful people. Christians recognise the grace and love of God, who out of fatherly goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us, so bountifully provides for the support of our body and life. God provides for us through the blessings of the land which He gives to us, and also through the work of our vocations.

New Testament Christians therefore, according to a custom of long standing, also joyfully celebrate the *Harvest Thanksgiving Festival* at the close of the harvest. At this time we love to appear in our house of worship, which is often beautifully decorated for this occasion, with the fruits and products of the land. At this time especially we to offer up to the Lord our praise and thanks for the bountiful harvest which He has given us.

And so today we raise our voices to God, the Giver of all good gifts and sing the hymn, “*O Lord, whose bounteous hand again Has poured Thy gifts in plenty down.*”² Being thus moved to gratitude, let us consider “*The Bounteous Hand of God.*” We will see how it has again blessed us and how we may keep its blessing. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How The Bounteous Hand Of God Has Again Blessed us.

Firstly, we should all realise that God has blessed us in our native land. Our text says,⁷ “*For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills;*”⁸ “*a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;*”⁹ “*a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in*

which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. This is a description of the Promised Land. We note its fertility and natural resources.

Our country is also blessed with its variety of climates and soils, grains and fruits, other natural resources. We have many local industries, mines, agriculture, and beautiful scenic sights in our country. As our text says, we *lack nothing*.

The beauty of the Promised land is also described in Ezekiel 20:6, ⁶ *“On that day I raised My hand in an oath to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, ‘flowing with milk and honey,’ the glory of all lands.* It was the best of all the lands. Truly, God provides abundantly for His children and for His blessings we should all be very grateful.

Secondly, we consider the current year. The harvest is collected and in due course the seed will be sown again. We not only need to give thanks for crops, but also for things like economic conditions, industry, employment, and the government we have.

No matter what the year holds for us we are to be grateful Christians. If favourable, then we are to acknowledge the blessings from the bounteous hand of God! If unfavourable, then we are still to give thanks as we remember what blessings we still have compared with those less fortunate than ourselves. Scripture says that we are to give *thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*³

Thirdly, we are to acknowledge and praise God because all these gifts come from the hand of God. Our text says, ¹⁰ *“When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.* We must acknowledge that all these blessings come from God and give God the thanks due to Him.

The farmer prepares the field, cultivates it, reaps a harvest, but God gives the seed, the air, the rain, the sunshine, the fertility of the soil, without which a harvest would be impossible.

No one, not even the greatest scientist, though he may know all the ingredients of seed and soil, has ever invented a living seed, a breath of fresh air,

a drop of rain or a bit of sunshine. It is all the handiwork of God. So also the coal and iron, oil and gas, copper and zinc, gold and silver, which we get from the earth. God alone has placed them there, and by His grace we are able to use these natural gifts for our earthly life and comfort.

No one else has created a living being, given him strength, intelligence, ingenuity, and skill to make these various, countless gifts of God useful and serviceable to man.

Our personal confession must be that *God has made me and all creatures. That He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil; and all this God does purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all these things it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him.* We would do well to study the explanation of the First Article in *Luther's Small Catechism* often because it reminds us of how God so abundantly provides for us.

Therefore we all are moved to render praise and thanks to God. Psalm 117 is a fine Psalm of praise. ***¹ Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!***

2. How We May Keep The Blessings Of The Bounteous Hand Of God.

But how may we keep these blessings? The children of Israel are warned in the text against the loss of their blessings, firstly, by forgetting God. Our text says, ***¹¹ Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, ¹² "lest -- when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; ¹³ "and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; ¹⁴ "when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*** How often it is that when people have plenty that they cast aside God and fall into idolatry.

Secondly, they were warned against loosing their blessings by boasting of their own power and ingenuity, in other words pride. Our text says, *‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’* We need to be very careful of the words “my” and “I”. *My house, my car!* Are we not but stewards and everything belongs to God? *I did this, I did that!* Isn’t it God who gives us abilities? Are we not merely His servants? The warning against pride also comes from Proverbs 16:18, ¹⁸ *Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.* Let us be warned by this.

Finally, curses were threatened to them for ingratitude. We read in Deuteronomy 28:15-18, ¹⁵ *But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:* ¹⁶ *“Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.* ¹⁷ *“Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ¹⁸ “Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.* These were literally fulfilled when the Israelites became disobedient, idolatrous and ungrateful. Terrible punishments were visited upon them including the fall and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Likewise we are warned by God against forgetting Him and abusing His blessings. God is not mocked. We read in Galatians 6:7-8, ⁷ *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.* God has blessed us with food that we may have to eat and that the poor may also live. If we hoard it, squander it, waste or destroy it in order to keep prices high and to satisfy our greed, or otherwise abuse it, we call down upon us the wrath and punishment of God.

Therefore the Lord cautions His people, ⁶ *“Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.* Israel should remember, firstly, who brought them out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness. Our text points out that it was God, ¹⁵ *“who led them through that great and terrible wilderness, ... who brought water for them out of the flinty rock;* and ¹⁶ *“who fed them in the wilderness with manna.*

Acknowledging what God has done for us will help us to have grateful hearts and thank and praise God.

Secondly, they should remember the true God, from whom all blessings flow, that the people of God may at all times have and enjoy the blessings sworn unto the fathers. We read in verse 18,¹⁸ ***“And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.***

Do we desire to be blessed? Will God continue to give us His blessings? Then let us in faith and in the fear of God be grateful for them! We are not the absolute owners of the blessings of God. We are only His stewards. He has given these blessings of the earth to us to be used according to His will. He will call us to account for the use of His gifts.

How then shall we use them? Scripture provides many answers. Firstly, for our own support. We read in 1 Timothy 5:8, ⁸ ***But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*** Proverbs 12:11, ¹¹ ***He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, But he who follows frivolity is devoid of understanding.***

Secondly, to help the poor and needy. We read in Ephesians 4:28, ²⁸ ***Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*** Proverbs 19:17, ¹⁷ ***He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given.*** Hebrews 13:16, ¹⁶ ***But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.***

Thirdly, we are to use His gifts to support the kingdom of God. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 tells us to use our talents wisely. We read in Matthew 25:15, ¹⁵ ***“And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability.*** The Lord distributes these talents to ***each according to his own ability.*** He gives to each of us the gifts that are exactly right.

In every case God provides the correct combination of abilities, talents, responsibilities, and opportunities, so that all of us can be of service to God in His kingdom. We are to be faithful stewards and spread and support the work of the Lord so more people may come to faith and be saved.

Let us Christians, then, as we thank God for the harvest, show and prove our gratitude. He has done great things for us and this makes us glad. He has brought us into His kingdom and made us His own through faith in Christ Jesus. We are His children, and He desires to bless us richly and daily by providing us with all we need for the support of this body and life.

Most importantly He forgives us all our sins through faith in Jesus Christ and heals our diseases. We read in Psalm 103:1-3, ***Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name!*** ² ***Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits:*** ³ ***Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases.***

He has opened to us heaven and prepared for us eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and during our life here on earth He ***opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing.***⁴

Let us with grateful hearts preserve these blessings by remaining true to God in faith and walking in His ways. Let us pray that God in His mercy and grace may never withhold them from us. Let us continue to learn even more from His Word and to look up to Him in faith and say:

As Thy prospering hand hath blest

May we give Thee of our best

And by deeds of kindly love

For Thy mercies grateful prove;

Singing thus through all our days,

*Praise to God, immortal Praise.*⁵ Amen.

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

¹ Exodus 23:16

² 568 LH

³ Ephesians 5:20

⁴ Psalm 145:15-16

⁵ Hymn 298 v4 ELHB