

Possessing the Promises

Exodus 23:20-33

9/21/08

Intro

God gave the Ten Commandments by powerfully speaking the words of the Law directly to them, but when the people heard the voice of the Lord, they became afraid and said to Moses, “You speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.” Although the best possible thing would have been if they had continued to listen to the voice of the Lord.

But indeed, the people stood at a distance and Moses approached God and received the ordinances that would guide Israel in how they should live their lives. These weren’t just random rules to restrict their lives, but these were instructions that would help them understand how to be men and women with the heart and character of God within them.

You see that clearly in certain ordinances such as in 23:4-5. What character we would have if we lived these words today.

God then gives them three feasts so that they will always remember what God has done for them; the Feast of Unleavened Bread – to remember the powerful hand of God in leading out of oppression in Egypt. Feast of the Harvest (Pentecost) bring in the first fruits of God’s blessing He has given to you. Finally, there was to be a Feast of the Ingathering (Feast of Tabernacles); to thank God for all the blessing he has poured out to them as they gather in their crops.

In other words, God would bless them in the land and they were to bring in the choice first fruits to show that they trusted and thanked God. They were not to boil a kid in his mother’s milk. In other words, they were not to imitate the ways of the world to find success, they belonged to God and they must look to God’s ways and trust that God’s promises were sure.

I. Accept What God is Offering

- God told Israel that he had bore them on eagles wings and brought them to himself, that if they would listen to his voice and keep his covenant,
- They then would be God's own possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
- The people then respond, "All that God has spoken we will do!" In other words, they accepted what God was offering them.
- Paul wrote that everything Israel experienced was for our instruction, and there are many parallels here in the life of the believer. There are many spiritual applications for us as we study these verses.

A. God will go before you

- God promised to send them an angel. Many believe this was the pre-incarnate Christ that we see in many places of the Old Testament.
- The promise was that He would go before them to guard them along the way and to bring them to the place which God prepared.
- It's very encouraging to know that God goes before us; that he knows what's ahead in the journey of our life, and that he has prepared the places in which we should go.

Illus- When there is so much instability around us like we have seen in the world's financial markets, it's so important to know with confidence that God already knows what is before us and is preparing the way.

- Jesus said something very similar to the disciples and to us in John 14...

John 14:1-6 “I go to prepare a place for you”

Psalm 91:11-12, For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, that you do not strike your foot against a stone.

B. Truly listen to Him

- There are several places in these verses where God tells them to listen to the voice of the Lord.
- This is very important to understand because many people eagerly long to see the promises of God in their lives, but miss this point entirely.
- There is a great promise here in verse 22 that God would be an enemy to their enemies and an adversary to their adversaries.
- Many people get off track in their lives and then want God to be an enemy to their enemies, but at that point God is focusing on bringing discipline into their lives and teaching them to listen to his voice.

App –The key here is understanding that the heart of the one who listens to the voice of the Lord is that he recognizes that God is the sovereign one and that we should listen to the God of the universe.

Illus – When Job had become afflicted so terribly, he presumed to complain against God, but God brought correction by helping him see God’s place.

Job 7:11, “Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”

Job 40:1-14 God’s answer to Job

Illus – Later, after Israel entered the Promised Land, Joshua was near Jericho and saw a man standing opposite him with a sword drawn in his hand. “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” Joshua asked. No, rather I come as captain of the host of the Lord.

C. He will bless what you do

- In verse 25, God said that He would bless their bread and their water and remove sickness and miscarriage from them in the land of promise.
- This is a blessing for Israel in the Promised Land as they sincerely listen to the voice of the Lord. Though the promises to Israel were tied to their being in the Promised Land, He does desire to bless our lives and heal our lives as well.
- I believe that the favor of the Lord is on his people. We favor our children and desire to bless them and so the Lord does so with us as well.

Psalm 1:1-3, How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.

- He says that He will send His terror ahead of them. In other words, people will know that God is with them.
- He will also send confusion to their enemies and cause that which was meant to harm them to be defeated.

Illus – In 1967 Israel was only 19 years old as a nation and three Arab nations were once again massing on their borders for an invasion, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Within a few days Israel had captured the Sinai, pushed back Jordan and was ready to accept a cease fire. Radio Damascus however broadcast that Israel was fighting in the streets of Damascus and the Syrian soldiers listening in confusion retreated.

<h2 style="margin: 0;">II. God’s Timing is Perfect</h2>

- God wanted Israel to possess the land of promise and said that He would go before them and drive out the enemies before them.
- He even says that He will use hornets in driving them out. Hornets would certainly do it, if you’ve even been stung by a hornet, you know it is much worse than being stung by a bee.
- But there is an important principle that follows that promise that is important for us to understand as well.

A. Victory will come little by little

- In verse 29, God said that he would not drive their enemies out in a single year, but would drive them out little by little.

- This is important because many people would like instant victory. We live in a culture that highly values instant everything.

Illus – We used to make instant potatoes at restaurant and they even had a little dimple for the gravy. We have instant messaging so every minute can be consumed.

- And that leads many people to expect instant spiritual victory.

Illus – In Africa, many assume that sin is due to demons and want to have someone to pray it out, but that is not the problem. What is needed is to learn to gain victory step by step.

Philippians 3:12-14 ‘Press on’ to the upward call

- God waits until we’re ready. If God did this or that in our lives in an instant, we wouldn’t be ready. We need to grow into victory and we need to grow into what God has in store for us.

Illus – It’s like when some want to get married. They know just the kind of person they want to have for a spouse, but forget that they aren’t at that point themselves.

- There are challenges and problems you don’t even yet know about and God is preparing you to be ready for what is coming your way.
- What we need is patience and to trust that God’s timing is perfect.

B. Make no covenant with the enemy

- God told them that they should make no covenant with the enemies in the land or with their gods.
- This was an important instruction and Joshua failed on this one when the Gibeonites came to them with a deception that they came from a far away country to honor God.
- This seemed like an easy one for Joshua and so he didn't check with God and as result made a covenant he should not have made.
- Some people make a covenant with some trouble in their lives when they say, "This thing is too difficult to defeat, I'll just have to live with it."
- Verse 33 is powerful, "They shall not live in your land, lest they make you sin against Me."
- God doesn't just take us out of Egypt, out of the land of oppression; He also leads us into the place of victory.
- But we need to understand that there will not be complete victory until we stand before the throne of heaven and are rid of this old flesh of ours.
- They key is to know that God is with us and does not want us to give up or give in; He goes before us to guard us and lead us on the way.

Ephesians 6:10-11, Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.