

Generous Obedience (Deuteronomy 26)

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Last October, we started preaching through the book of Deuteronomy. By mid-July we made it to Chapter 12. And Chapters 12-26 are a section that contain laws about every-day life (civil laws) and laws about worshipping God. This included instructions on (but not exclusive to) laws about worship, idolatry, clean and unclean foods, tithes, feasts, leaders, sexual immorality and marriage, and then today we will consider how Moses will close this section, this public address of Israel as we close out Chapter 26. And what we will see this morning is that **an unreserved response of worship to God's goodness will be made manifest through our eager thanksgiving, diligent generosity and enthusiastic obedience.**

But before we dive in...please remember that these "Specific Covenant Stipulations" from chapter 12 to 26 were not only for how Israel were to live and conduct themselves now, but much more so, upon entering the promised land. Moses was giving them instructions for what God would expect of them once they arrived in Canaan. Israel's arrival in the promised land was not the ultimate end game. God would very much still require of them to live according to His Statutes, and these "Specific Covenant Stipulations" would help them not to forget God's faithfulness in the past, help them not to forget how to live among their neighbors (Israelites and non-Israelites alike) in the present, and would keep them from falling into temptation, especially idolatry in the future. God intended these laws as a means of holy living, and to remind Israel of her daily need and dependence upon Him.

So this morning, we will see this happen as Moses highlights for us our response to God's faithfulness.

- Eager Thanksgiving
- Diligent Generosity
- Enthusiastic Obedience

1. Eager Thanksgiving (v1-11)

I titled this first point "Eager Thanksgiving" because its not just "giving thanks" as in..."thanks God...I guess?" No, It is eager, joy filled, worship oriented thanksgiving because the Israelites were recognizing that any good or any increase they have is



from the hand of an almighty God who has shown Himself true to His promises by bringing them into this good and bountiful land.

And so as I mentioned a moment ago, Moses has been teaching about “Specific Covenant Stipulations”, in chapters 12-26 for how Israel are to live and conduct themselves, he begins by addressing the “how” of thanksgiving. How does God expect you to express eager thanksgiving as a response to His covenant faithfulness? By bringing the very firstfruits, the first of the crops that are yielded when you have taken possession of the land, to the Lord as an offering.

And they are not only to bring the firstfruits but they are to come and express or acknowledge something very specific. Look at verse 3 with me. *“And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.’”* And by coming and acknowledging this very specific reality, they were bringing their firstfruits to God as an acknowledgement that God has been faithful to fulfill His promises. This, at the same time disarms Israel of any notion or temptation that the increase...the fruits of the land is because of anything they have done. No. God has done what He promised to do for Israel generations earlier. This “firstfruits” offering then becomes eager thanksgiving to the One who has done great things for us. That is the how.

The second part to this is closely related to the how...its the why. Why are they to bring the firstfruits?

And I think it’s important for us to understand that by bringing firstfruits to the priest and saying: *‘I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.’* That they are declaring that God has done it all. It’s not like this was a team effort...so let’s go ahead and express a bit of gratitude to God for His contribution...again, No...He has done it all. He is bringing you into this land, He has promised this land, He has prepared this land, He has distributed and apportioned this land, a land yielding increase for which we did not labor. And as a sign that you understand and proclaim this, bring the firstfruits offering as eager thanksgiving.

Brothers and sisters, for us, this means that worshipping God, expressing eager thanksgiving, cannot look like saying, “thanks for getting me over the goal line Jesus”. I managed to work this ball up 99 yards across this field, but I really needed you when we had 3 seconds on the clock 4 points behind and we were 4th and Goal, and you came through for me...so thanks hey. Brothers and sisters does God hold us accountable for our actions, absolutely and are we expected to act in obedience, absolutely...we have a

part to play. But whatever God does, He does according to the counsel of His will, for our GOOD, and for HIS GLORY! All the glory is His, Israel, so bring the firstfruits in acknowledgement of this.

Imagine for a moment, being an Israelite who has been wandering through the desert for 40 years. And for those 40 years you have been eating manna, as the Lord provided. You have not owned land. Which means you have not been cultivating land, and now God says that He is bringing you into a land that is bountiful that according to v15 flows with milk and honey. And it not only flows with milk and honey, but you will reap crops from plants and trees that you did not even plant as God would speak by Joshua to Israel and would say in [Joshua 24:13](#) *"I gave you a land on which you had not labored...you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant."*

What's the point? God was requiring this "firstfruits" offering as both an acknowledgment from Israel that the very increase they are seeing is not their doing, but rather belongs to God, and secondly as a reminder of their ongoing need to be thankful for all the fruit that will come as they eat the fruit of vineyards and orchards they did not plant, so don't be tempted to think that your success in taking possession of this land is thanks to your bravery or tactical skills in the art of warfare.

It brings to mind something that Matthew reminded us of last week when he said: *"Brothers and sisters, the money in our checking, savings, retirement, and investment accounts is not ultimately ours. It's the Lord's."* And Moses is continuing along this same vein by reminding Israel that all that they have, not only their firstfruits, are the Lord's. Therefor let us bring eager thanksgiving. Eager acknowledgment that God is and has been so so good to us.

If you are like me we can often be tempted to think, that when we bring the Lord our "firstfruits" our offering, that we are somehow being so obedient and kind to offer to the Lord some of what really is our own? We have worked the ground, we have put in the time to learn a skill or trade, we have meticulously applied our skill or trade, we have created wealth or "increase" and now we, from the generosity of our hearts are bringing to God a sign of our goodwill towards Him that He can use in whatever way He desires...BUT... God...this is really important....do not touch the remaining 90% or whatever amount remains after my offering...that's my just reward for my hard work.

Brothers and sisters, this attitude misses the "why" completely. That is why the Israelite would say, *"A wandering Aramean was my father."* This refers to Jacob because Jacob married the daughters of Laban, his uncle, who was an Aramean. So, as you bring your firstfruits, as a sign of thanksgiving, begin by remembering as far back as your forefather Jacob and how he was a wandering man. Then remember how he

went to Egypt and your people were *“few in number”* ...yet there *“he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous”*. Then the Egyptians treated your people harshly and humiliated you and laid hard labor on you. But God has brought you out of that place, from under the harsh rule of Egypt, in the sight of all the surrounding nations, and then we get to respond....” *“And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God.”*

Brothers and sisters, Eager Thanksgiving, worship of our Creator and Provider, is the ultimate aim when we bring any offering to God. Because naked we came into this world and naked we shall return...but any increase is the Lord’s doing. Therefore our offerings are to be eager thanksgiving. And this is really made so clear for us when we read verse 11. *“11 And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.”*

And note that part of this rejoicing is not only intended for the Israelite, it’s for the Levite and the sojourner who is among them. Doug Bratt said:

“Israel has known what it’s like to be homeless and vulnerable. When she finds a home in the land of promise, Moses challenges her to continue to remember the refugees who live with her.”

Oh Christian, hasn’t God been good to us? The Israelites were celebrating and worshipping and honoring God by bringing, with eager thanksgiving, their firstfruits because God had brought them into an earthly, and may I add, perishing earthly home. But we, who are His, have been promised an eternal, imperishable home because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. How much more ought we also to respond with eager thanksgiving for all He has done for us?

And one of the ways we get to respond to God, with eager thanksgiving for all He has done is through our generosity for the advancement of the Gospel to other believers and the sojourners among us who may not yet have heard of and had an opportunity to respond to the good news of the Gospel, which brings us to the 2nd point.

2. Diligent Generosity (v12-15)

In verses 1-11 Moses was addressing the Israelites concerning a firstfruits offering that they were to bring to the priest as an acknowledgement that God has been good, He has fulfilled His promises, we are now seeing an “increase” in the form of crops that we did not plant, and in acknowledgment of His goodness, we bring Him the firstfruits, for all the fruits clearly and rightfully are His.

Now, for the first time, Moses uses the word tithe, which helps us see that this is clearly something new. Something different. The first was a firstfruits offering, now Moses talks about a tithe and the purpose of a “tithe”.

Now before we go on, we have to consider that for Israel, in the OT, a tithe was formalized, and regulated. Why? Because, being under the Old Covenant God had given them the Law, and they were to obey the law as God’s covenant partners...this was their end of the bargain, so to speak. The perfect upholding of the Law, down to the last commandment, was what they had to do and is the very reason why we needed a savior. They failed, time and time again, as we do, at upholding God’s commands.

Israel could not uphold the law, Jesus however fulfilled the law for us and kept the law perfectly, and so as new covenant believers we are no longer bound to the law in a covenantal way but only as it has been fulfilled by Christ, specifically here the law of tithing.

So, we don’t need to give Josh? We absolutely are to still give, the principle of giving to kingdom work remains as steadfast as ever, but we are no longer restricted by a law-bound or law-regulated “10%”. James Petty says it this way: *“Because you love God, the goal of your financial plan should be to maximize what you can give to kingdom work – to God’s people, his mission, and the needy.”*

And so when we ask questions like, how much should I give? I don’t need to give more than 10% right? Do I give “x” percentage before or after taxes? Can I channel all my giving to my favorite non-profit? These are all wrong questions.

Rather, today, God still requires of us to give diligently. Carefully. Specifically. But the requirement to give towards kingdom work in the NT is no longer regulated, because we are to give-not in an attempt to be faithful to covenantal obligations, rather we are to uphold biblical generosity as a response. A response to Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, the Most High, who laid down His life for you and me on the cross. He suffered, bled and died...for us! And in response, not as repayment, not as an attempt to merit the free gift of grace held out to all who would believe, but in response to the transforming grace of the gospel in our lives, we are invited to give to the work of Gospel proclamation (first and foremost) but also as a means of care towards those who may be in physical need.

Doesn’t that just change the landscape of our giving completely? It’s not just another box to tick as a New Testament, New Covenant believer. It’s meant to be a joyful, eager, faith-filled, overflowing response to the power of the Gospel.

Now I mentioned that our giving, our diligent generosity is to go first and foremost towards the work of Gospel proclamation, and Gospel proclamation is nowhere more prominent than in and through the work of the local church, and secondarily to bring physical relief to those in need. And we can see this priority in verses 11, 12, and 13. But let's look at v12. *"When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled."*

And since we are no longer bound to a "tithe" I will for the remainder of this message talk about our generosity. Where is our generosity to go first? *"giving it to the Levite"*. Who does the Levite represent in the NT? Pastors, shepherds, elders, overseers...those who exercise and extend spiritual care towards God's people through the teaching, preaching and application of God's Word. 1 Tim. 5:17-18 reads: *17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."*

So our giving is to go towards whichever local church God has made you part of. Where you are fed the Word of God. So that the Word of God can continue to be administered there and could be expanded to all nations as missionaries are sent and churches are planted as the Great Commission has commanded us.

But by God's grace, this is not the only place we are invited to give and be generous towards, albeit primary. Our giving is also intended to bring relief to *"...the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled."* Our giving is to be an expression of thankfulness for all Christ has done for us, and we not only get to do this through giving to the ongoing gospel proclamation of our church, we are also afforded the incredible opportunity to share of what God has entrusted to us, with those who are in need. And for that reason, it needs to be careful, well considered, prayerful, faith filled, giving.

Now before we move on. I'd like to take just a moment to say, church, by God's grace many, many of you excel at this. Giving faithfully, towards the very things God has called this particular local church to, is something that I believe you are exemplary in. And although there is always opportunity for us to trust God for continued growth, I hope you are all encouraged to know your giving is a constant source of deep encouragement to the leadership of this church. You are an example to me...truly...and I thank you for it. May God grant that a church plant in Windhoek will be filled with believers who have a similar heart and passion to give towards gospel ministry as you are.

So, as you do so well... our diligent generosity is to go first and foremost towards the work of Gospel proclamation, but it is also meant to be done with excellence, carefully...diligently. And we see this in V 13-14 which reads: *“13 then you shall say before the Lord your God, ‘I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite (There it is again...), the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them. 14 I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the Lord my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me.”*

Israel was clearly expected to give diligently, to do according to all that God has commanded them. They were to be painstakingly careful in how they gave, so as to not transgress the command of God. So, when it says: *I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning*. What would this look like for us? Well it could look like giving in a way that is not cheerful. But God...God loves a cheerful giver. Or perhaps we could look at the portion that reads I have not *“removed any of it while I was unclean”*. What would it look like to give in an unclean way? Maybe begrudgingly or reluctantly or under compulsion. That is neither God’s plan nor desire for our giving. And so, our generosity has to be diligent, careful, and intentional, but at the same time cheerful, eager, and grateful.

And don’t we know, all too well, that this kind of giving is not something that’s just going to happen. Our giving is not automatically up there next to our mortgage and medical insurance...in terms of priority. But...by God’s grace...because of the amazing transformation of the Gospel on our lives, it should be our desire, even though it may not always be our plan. And so, I believe an exhortation to us all this morning is to plan. Plan to give. As James Petty said again: *“...the goal of your financial plan should be to maximize what you can give to kingdom work...”*

I am sure you have all heard the quip: “if you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” Well this actually rings rather true in our financial planning, especially as it pertains to giving.

And brothers and sisters, God will lead us, if we ask and trust Him, how and where we are to give. If we ask Him, He will give us faith where He intends us to sow from what He has entrusted to us. **Because God has specific plans and intentions for what He has entrusted to us**, and He is not a God who will leave us in the dark to guess as to what He expects from us with what He has entrusted to us.

And before moving to the last point, let me add that God has promised to equip us for generosity. 2 Corinthians 9:10 says: *“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for*

food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

God will not only show and give us faith for where to sow, He will supply the very seed we need, in order to sow. So, if you truly feel, like your income at the moment just does not allow you to be generous, consider the fact that God is not necessarily after you to give as much as all the people around you, but rather to give according to your means. The poor widow in Luke 21 gave only two pennies, and Jesus said she gave more than all the others, not because of the vastness of her giving, but because of a generous heart that gave sacrificially according to the faith and means that God had entrusted to her.

And it is when we have this heart towards God and when we have this mindset towards our resources that we can say with the Israelite in v15 *“15 Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.”*

Because it is with a heart that contributes and gives diligently, carefully and generously towards Gospel proclamation and towards the needs of our neighbors that God can bless us so that we in turn may be a blessing. And then finally...

3. Enthusiastic Obedience (V16-19)

Enthusiastic Obedience. As I mentioned at the outset this morning, our scripture closes now in these verses not only this morning’s message, but the entire section from chapter 12 to this very point at the end of chapter 26.

And so, Moses summarizes not only the verses on firstfruits and tithing, but all the commands that he has just addressed them with by coming to a point of decision. Moses almost shakes them out of the mode where they have been listening to lists and lists of commands, and essentially says: “Hey, are you ready to do and be wholly obedient to all you have been commanded?” The laws and commands were not meant to be memorized as an end in and of itself. They were not meant to be advisory. They are commands from God, the creator of Heaven and earth Himself. The question became, will you be obedient? Will you be enthusiastically obedient to do all God has commanded you to do with all your heart and with all your soul?

16 “This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. 17 You have declared today that the Lord is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice.”

This very abruptly and clearly pointed to the conclusion of Moses' address. Just listen to how it was bookended all the way back in Chapter 12:1. *"1 These are the statutes and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth.*

By bookending these chapters in this way Moses helps Israel to see clearly the closure of the section AND reminds them God has been the One addressing them.

So although it has been Moses' voice that has been doing the speaking for the last 15 chapters of Deuteronomy, Moses now makes clear, that God is the author and giver of all these commands. Moses essentially says: It's not me who requires these things of you...It is God, the one who will bring you into the promised land and show Himself true to the promises He made to our fathers.

Do you hear that this morning church? Do we understand that the preaching and application of the preaching since July (although that is hopefully true of all preaching and not just this timeframe) but that all the preaching and application that has been preached from this pulpit has been God addressing His church. Do we see the preaching moment on a Sunday as God, through the preaching of His Word, and the application of it to our hearts by His Spirit, being kind and gracious to address us, guide us, challenge us, motivate us, and equip us for every good work?

And by the way, did you know that is why we as a church and a denomination are so passionate about preaching expository sermons through books of the Bible verse by verse, start to finish. Because 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches us: *16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

How are you equipped for every good work Christian? By being addressed by the Word of God and then being enthusiastically obedient to do ALL that it commands us. That is the very nature and God given design of the preaching moment. To complete and equip us for the good works God has prepared for us. Praise be to God.

So Moses helps Israel see that it has been God addressing them, and requiring enthusiastic obedience from them...and then a closing declaration.

18 And the Lord has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, 19 and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised."



Christian, do you hear God speaking to you? Do you hear the pleasure of the Lord when you are obedient to worship Him in the ways He has described from Deuteronomy 12? Do you hear the pleasure of the Lord when you fight against Idolatry as the Lord prescribed in Deuteronomy 13? Do you hear the pleasure of the Lord when you practice justice (ch 16), uphold His faithfulness with your body (ch 22), remain pure (ch 23), guard the gospel in matters of divorce and remarriage (ch 24)? Because God has said: *that you are to keep all his commandments, 19 and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made...*

What a fitting and amazing statement to finish off this section of commands. What a promise, that God, Yahweh, the GREAT I AM, sits on His righteous throne, looks down on us...His handiwork and promises "*...that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised.*"

Isn't it astounding. And brothers and sisters, for those who put their faith in Jesus Christ, the only name by which we can be saved, this is not just a hope we are holding out for. The last three words say...AS.HE.PROMISED.

God has promised and guaranteed His favor on those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Not because of our doing, but because of what He has accomplished for us by giving us His Son, a plan for the fullness of time.

So may we, by God's grace continue to grow in **our unreserved response of worship to God's goodness through our eager thanksgiving, diligent generosity and enthusiastic obedience.**

Amen.