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DEUTERONOMY 7:1 – 8:20

Today's lesson is **Deuteronomy 7 and 8**. However, we're going to look more closely at **chapter 8** than **chapter 7** today. As we've said before, Moses gives one long, eloquent sermon in **Deuteronomy**. He brings to the attention of the people all the things that God has done for their ancestors and also for **them** during the past years. And in **chapter 7** Moses tells the people that they are

- not to intermarry with the enemies in the land
- not to make any covenants with the enemies in the land
- to totally destroy the images and altars of the gods of the enemies in the land

The bottom line of this was that they were to totally destroy the enemies in the land of Canaan. If they totally destroyed them, they wouldn't be intermarrying with them or worshipping their gods or making any covenants with them, would they?

And then, Moses goes on to tell the people that God didn't choose them because they were more in number or for any other reason except that He loved them.

And Moses also tells them that if they obey God they will be blessed:

Deuteronomy 7:13-16...

And Moses goes on to tell them that it will be the LORD, Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God of Israel Himself who will deliver their enemies into their hands. That's in a nutshell what **chapter 7** contains. But, let's look at **chapter 8**.

Deuteronomy 8 teaches us a very important truth. The late Ron Dunn had a series of messages entitled "Strange Ministers." And one of his sermons came from this chapter. He entitled this sermon "The Ministry of Failure." And today, I want us to key in on the ministry of failure. Is there such a thing? And if there is, exactly how does it work in the life of a believer?

We have a tendency to believe that we can always correctly evaluate everything that happens to us. I mean, we know a blessing when we see one, don't we? And we know a curse when we see one.

But, the longer I live, the more I believe that sometimes kings come to my door dressed as beggars and princes as paupers and many times blessings come wrapped in the rags of a curse.

Sometimes sorrow is the disguise that real joy wears.
And many times you and I will miss the ministry in our lives because we're looking for God to minister to us in a certain specified way when He's actually ministering to us in another.

So, let's look today at one of these ministers that God sends our way to work His purpose in our lives...to bring us to where He wants us to be.

I have no doubt that this truth is relevant to all of us because all of us have experience failure. Every Christian experiences it sooner or later.

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I believe what **Deuteronomy 8** teaches us is that one of the most effective ministers that God has to work in your life is the minister of failure.

Now, I'm going to make a statement and I'm going to bring the Scripture out in a moment, but I want to make this statement...God not only **allows** us to fail, but there are times when the Lord actually **maneuvers** us into a situation of failure...when the Lord actually **negotiates** for our failure, because that is the only way He can teach us a lesson we need to learn.

Have you ever found that God sometimes adds some verses to the Bible that you just know weren't there before? You know, you read the Bible, and you read it, and you read it, and you think you've read everything in it and one day you pick up a familiar passage of Scripture and you see something that's never been there before. You just know the Lord's kind of inserted it while you were asleep.

Well, that's sort of the way it is with Deuteronomy 8. Let's look at Verses 1-2...

"And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years..."

Now, when we talk about the forty years of wilderness, we think of failure, don't we? The people of Israel had come to Kadesh-Barnea. God had given them the promise that if they would just believe Him and obey Him they would cross over into Canaan.

By the way, I know I've said this before...but Canaan never represents physical death. No matter what the old hymns and gospel songs say...Canaan in the Bible never represents heaven and Jordan never represents physical death. Canaan in the Bible does not represent heaven.

**There were giants in Canaan. There are no giants in heaven.
There were battles to be fought in Canaan. There are no battles to be fought in heaven.
There was failure and sin in Canaan. There are no failures and sin in heaven.**

So, if Canaan doesn't represent heaven, what does it represent? **It represents everything God saved us to be in *this* life.** Canaan doesn't refer to the sweet bye-and-bye...it refers to the sweet here and now. That's where God expects us to live.

We saw last week that God brought them out in order to bring them in.

The reason that God led the people out of Egypt was not simply to get them out of Egypt, but to get them into the Promised Land...into the land of fullness...where they could live in the full promises of God and be everything God wanted them to be.

And we need to understand that when God saved us He did not save us **simply to get us out of hell...nor to simply get us into heaven.** He saved us in order that we might experience in our everyday lives everything that God wants us to be in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Moses said, "He brought us out that He might bring us in"...but when the people had the opportunity to enter in they made a mistake. They disbelieved God. They disobeyed God. And you know the story...for the next forty years, they wandered in that wilderness.

And I had always assumed that that forty year period was forty years of failure and that's a right assumption. But, I had also assumed that that forty years was simply aimless wandering and was wasted time and wasted experience.

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But, I want you to notice the phrase that caught my attention. Moses says, ***“You shall remember all the way which the LORD thy God has led you in the wilderness these forty years...”*** Notice, He led them while they were *in* the wilderness.

And in **verse 15**, he says He led them **through** that wilderness and **fed** them while they were *in* that wilderness. And He did that Moses says in the latter part of **verse 16...“to do good for you in the end.”**

I like that!! And that is the way you can see everything that God lets come into your life...**that He might do you good.** God led them in that wilderness experience in order to accomplish something in their lives He could not otherwise accomplish.

Those forty years in the wilderness were not wasted years...they were not aimless wanderings...and even though they **had failed** at Kadesh-Barnea...even though they **had disobeyed** and **disbelieved God**, yet God did not abandon nor did He give up in His purpose.

But He continued to lead them those forty years in the wilderness in order to do them good...in order to accomplish in their lives something He could not otherwise accomplish. **To God be the glory!**

I don't know where you are in your spiritual walk at the beginning of this new year. Maybe you're in the wilderness.

Maybe you would say,
“I do feel like I'm in a wilderness.

For awhile in my Christian pilgrimage, everything was going smooth, everything was going as I felt it ought to go, but something happened...

a series of circumstances fell upon me and it just seems like I've lost my direction...I'm experiencing 'spiritual vertigo'...I'm disoriented.

I don't know whether I'm up or down. I don't know whether God's alive or dead. I don't know whether He loves me or doesn't love me and it seems that everything I do just turns to ashes and I'd have to say honestly this morning that I'm in the wilderness.”

Well, I have good news for you. God never wastes time and He never wastes experience. And if you belong to God and are one of His children, I want you to know that everything that comes to pass in your life God uses to perfect His purpose and plan in your life.

And I believe that one of the most effective ministers that God has sent our way is the minister of failure. And God has done some things in my life through failure that I know He could not have otherwise done.

Why does God let us go through the wilderness experiences of our lives? Why does He allow us to fail? Why are there times when God even actually negotiates for our failure? How does God use failure in our lives?

Well, I hope when we leave here this morning we'll know the answer to these questions.

1) God uses failure to empty us of pride.

Verse 2...

Look at **verse 2...** ***“And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you...”*** WHY? ***“...to humble you...”***

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And he says the same thing in **verse 16...** *“In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you...”*

Verse 3 says, “And He humbled you...”

In other words, God led them into the wilderness...WHY?...well, Moses said it three times...humble them and He did it!

First of all, God uses failure to empty us of pride. Now, man's basic sin...you might say the original sin of the universe is the sin of pride.

And God's toughest task in our lives is to humble us and to empty us of our pride...to bring us to the place where we recognize that we can't handle life by ourselves...

I can't even handle myself by myself...and God has to bring me to the place where it seems as though He pulls the rug from under my and I fall flat on my face!

You're all familiar with **Proverbs 3:5** that tells us to lean not unto our own understanding but trust in the Lord. The Hebrew word translated “trust” has the idea of falling flat on your face...of lying helplessly face down on the ground. **That's a pretty good description of what trust is...of God bringing you to a place where you have no alternative than to trust Him.**

I want to tell you something what I believe with all my heart. I believe a person will never trust God until he has to. There is something about man that is basically self-sufficient. Folks just like to **think** they can handle life all by themselves.

And God is forced many times to bring us into circumstances and situations where we have to confess, “I cannot handle it.”

Someone once put it this way... **“I never knew Jesus was all I needed until Jesus was all I had.”**

See, as long as I think I can do things myself, I'm going to try. As long as I have some other plan, some other gimmick...one more phone call...whatever...I'm going to use it. And if God is going to bring me to the place where He wants me to be...and that is absolutely dependant upon Him...He must first of all destroy my faith in myself.

Now, I know that we say that we have to be self-confident and we have to have faith in ourselves, and I understand that to a certain extent, but what I'm trying to say is that as long as I'm trusting in myself and as long as you are trusting in yourself, we'll never trust in God, and He will have bring us to a point where we have no other choice.

And we must understand that this is a painful process...this process of God's bringing about circumstances in our lives to empty us of our pride.

Now, this pride takes **two forms**. I've already been talking about one of them...the pride of self-sufficiency...the pride that says, “I can handle this situation myself.” And I believe one of the greatest examples of this found in Scripture is Simon Peter.

If you follow carefully the career of Simon Peter, you'll find that Jesus, most of the time, was trying to teach Simon Peter this very point...that Simon had not arrived...that he had not achieved...that he was not sufficient and Jesus was constantly trying to empty Simon of his self-sufficient pride.

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And on the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus made a prophecy. He said that the disciples would forsake Him and that of course was Simon's cue. And he began to speak and this is what he said...

He said, "Lord," and I'm going to paraphrase it a little bit. He said, "Lord, I understand what you're saying and I know that the rest of this bunch is of the sort that'll leave You, but I want You to know, Lord, You can count on me. I'm not going to forsake you, Lord. I'm willing to go to prison with You. I'm even willing to die for you." Isn't that a pretty fair paraphrase of what Peter said?

I wonder if that discouraged Jesus. Three and a half years of ministry and Simon still had not learned! Now, listen carefully to what Jesus says... I told you a moment ago that sometimes the Lord negotiates for our failure. Here it is. Jesus said, **"Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you and when you are turned again, [when you get straightened out from this mess], that you will be able to strengthen your brethren."**

Now, the word translated "desired"... "Satan hath desired to have you..." is a word that means **"to obtain by asking permission."**

Do you know what Jesus was saying? He was saying, **"Satan hath asked permission to get hold of you and turn you inside out and I have given it."**

Now, that's really encouraging to me in one respect. It says to us that the devil can't touch us without the permission of the Lord Jesus. He cannot do it!

God has built a hedge about me and the only way the devil can touch me and get to me is if the Lord Jesus gives His permission. And He was saying, "Simon, there's only one way you're going to learn."

And by the way, he learned. If you'll follow his career you'll find he never again had problem with self-sufficient pride. God taught him something through his failure He could not teach him any other way.

And I say to you that there are some things in our lives...whether it's our home life, business life, church life, personal life...there are some things God is not going to be able to teach us apart from failure. **He's going to have to manipulate us into a situation where we're faced with failure to empty us of our self-sufficient pride.**

And Jesus said to Peter, "When thou art turned again..." which meant that Jesus knew that Simon was going to fail, but when he failed and learned the lesson of that failure, **then he would be competent for ministry.** He said, **"...then you'll be able to strengthen your brethren."**

The same thing can be said about Job. When the devil came before God, who initiated that conversation about Job? Who brought up Job's name? God did!

The devil reported to God on a certain day. I don't know how he got there, but anyway he was there in God's presence and God initiated that conversation! And He said, "Have you considered My servant, Job?"

That sort of makes me wish God wouldn't do any bragging on me to the devil. He said, "Have you considered my servant, Job...there's not a man like him on the face of the earth." And the devil said, "Yes, but the only reason he serves you is because it pays. Everything's going

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well. Everything's going easy. You've blessed him. He's healthy. If you were to lift that hedge and let me get hold of him, he wouldn't serve you."

And you know, that's a good question. Are you serving God today simply because everything's going well? What if everything in your life were to fall to pieces and you were to lose your health and you lose your family, would you still serve the Lord?

The devil asked God a question, "Does Job serve God for naught?" He's saying, "A man won't serve God for nothing. A man serves God for what he can get out of Him." That's a pretty good question.

And you know, it's interesting. If you read the **Book of Job**, you'll find that never one time did Job refer to the devil. As a matter of fact, the Bible refers to Satan's affliction of Job as "**the hand of God touching Job.**" And I want you to know this morning that sometimes what the devil wants to do to us just somehow or another fits right into God's plan.

The devil wanted to turn Peter inside out and sift him as wheat and Jesus, "Well, you know, I think that would be good for him and I will give you permission to do it." And God will use failure to empty us of our self-sufficient pride.

But not only of the pride of self-sufficiency...He also uses failure to empty us of the pride of self-satisfaction. Look at **verse 3...**

"And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know..."

In other words, God did such a work in their lives as to deprive them of certain resources and things they were depending upon and made them cry out, "Lord, I'm hungry."

I want to ask you this morning...are you hungry for the Lord? See, a person won't eat if he's not hungry. And you'll never discover the resources of God until God first of all puts you in a situation where you're hungry for Him.

And many times the only way you can be hungry for what God has is for God to deprive you of what you've been feeding yourself on.

So, God uses failure to empty us of the pride of **self-sufficiency** and the pride of **self-satisfaction**.

2) God uses failure to expose us to the wickedness that's in our hearts.

Look again at **verse 2...**

"...the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments, or not."

And He says the same thing in **verse 16...**

"...that He might test you..."

Now, God said that He led them through this wilderness to test them...to expose what was in their hearts...whether they would keep God's commands. **Now...it wasn't that God wanted to find out what was in their hearts. God already knew. He wanted them to know what was in their hearts.**

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And folks, God knows what is in your heart. He knows whether or not you're going to keep His commandments. He knows that! But, you don't know it.

If you'll go back to the **Book of Exodus**, you'll find that when Moses was making preparation to go up on Mt. Sinai to get the Law, Israel made a boast. Here was their boast, "All that the Lord God says unto us we will do...everything God tells us to do, we will do." **They thought in their hearts was total obedience.**

They didn't know that idolatry and terrible sin was in their hearts, and God used that failure to expose them to the unknown wickedness that was in their hearts.

We can go back again to Simon Peter. That was one of the accomplishments of his failure. If you had sat down with Simon Peter as Jesus attempted to do and tried to convince Peter that lurking in the darkness of his heart was denial of Christ and cursing, he wouldn't have been convinced. And the only way that Jesus could prove to Peter what was in his heart was by letting him fall into that failure.

Well, I want to tell you something. If there is sin and there is that wickedness in my heart, I want to know about it. If I have a tumor growing in my body, I want to know about it. I want it to be exposed. I want something to happen to expose to me the sickness that's in my body, so it can be treated before it kills me.

And you see, when God lets us go into failure, God is really being merciful to us because He is exposing to us some things in our lives so that we can deal with them and get God's treatment and God's help in those areas of our lives.

You would never have been able to convince Simon Peter...and there are some things in your life that you don't know are there. There are some things...some potential to sin in your heart that you don't know is there.

I'll tell you exactly what will happen. God will arrange a set of circumstances and you'll react to those circumstances and you'll say, "I didn't know that was there" and if you're smart, you'll also say, "but I'm glad I know now!"

Well, very quickly, let's look at the last point about this ministry of failure...

3) God uses failure to educate us as to the true values in life.

I believe one of my greatest problems and one of your greatest problems is a **wrong system of values**. We place values on the wrong things and God has to patiently educate us and teach us what really counts in life and you'll find this in the **verse 3...**

"And He humbled you, and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know that..."

WHY? "...that..." - that's a purpose clause - *"...that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD."*

Now, folks, that's one of the greatest statements in all the Bible. Man does **not** live by bread alone, but he lives by the Word of God.

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Now, this is so relevant to the Israelites because one of their primary complaints was lack of food...lack of bread. And God was trying to teach them that a man's life is not sustained by bread...but by the Word of God.

Now, the importance of seeing this is this...if I look upon bread as the source of my life, as the source of the meaning of my life, as the source of fulfillment in my life, then I'm going to work for bread. But, man doesn't live by that. Man's life...its source...its substance...comes from the Word of God.

I have found and I believe it more today than ever before...the goodness of God is that **God is always with me...**

- **in good times and bad...**
- **in hard times and easy...**
- **when I'm spiritual and when I'm not spiritual...**
- **when I'm obedient, when I'm disobedient...**

God is with me. And God's chief purpose in my life is to bring me to the place where I recognize that the greatest good in life is **to know Him and to feel His presence and to serve Him and to worship Him and honor Him.**

And I tell you, folks, sometimes the only way God can teach us that is through failure...the ministry of failure. I hope you learn to recognize that minister.

Many times he's like that king that's dressed like a beggar and that prince that looks like a pauper. Sometimes he's not a very pleasant character at all to meet. But, he is just as surely a minister of God as your pastor who stands behind the pulpit on Sunday morning.

May we recognize this minister and learn from this minister. What a waste it is to fail and not learn from our failure. May we take a lesson from Simon Peter, and learn that many times the Lord Jesus has granted permission for us to fail...

...that He has actually negotiated for our failure and even at times maneuvered us into failure, but that through everything in our lives...as surely as it was the hand of God touching Job, it is also the hand of God touching us...that all things happen to us for the reason of teaching those things that will conform us to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a mighty God we serve! And what a mighty Word He has given to us. What a mighty truth we can learn from this wonderful old book that Moses wrote so many, many years ago!