

A Time for Thanksgiving
Scripture Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Sunday, November 24, 2019 at The First Congregational Church of
Marshalltown, Iowa

Introduction: The comedian Alan King remembered his father, who walked from his home in Russia across Europe to take a ship to start a new life in the United States, alone at 15 years of age. King knew his opportunities rested on the shoulders of his parents, and he was thankful. While our stories may not be so dramatic, we live dependant on God, and most of us (maybe not all) owe a debt of thanks to our forebears.

Set the stage:

The Bible strikes a similar theme when Moses instructs the people on how to worship God after they have entered the Promised Land, remembering the oppression in Egypt as if they had been there themselves. Claiming the whole story, from Jacob and his clan going to that nation to find food during famine, until their deliverance some 400 years later, it emphasizes that everything they have, are and have accomplished thus far is because God is faithful to keep promises and suffering people have trusted Him. This is their defining moment as a nation. I'd like to make a few comments about some verses in this passage.

A time to consider the promises of the Word of God

For us, the Promised Land (ultimately Heaven) is the promises of God brought to bear on this life of ours on earth.

Verse 1 "and it shall be, when you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it..." Those promises are yours to receive and claim. Accounts vary, but according to "bibleinfo.com" the Bible has 3,573 promises. Here is one very common one: Hebrews 13:5b, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Some are conditional upon obedience, some reflect the nature of God and will never change. It is up to us to research them and then incorporate them into our prayer life.

A time to consider to opportunities of our lives

Reading a few verses down we find another mention that implies that our finest evidence of a thankful heart is reflected on a thoroughly Biblical prayer life and also in how we "construct our lives". What we do with what is within and before us.

Verse 9 "He has brought us to this place and has given us this land ' a land flowing with milk and honey'" The phrase means "really good farmland". Our blessings often lie in the opportunities before us. What we make of the lives we construct with those opportunities is our obligation before God. A great story about making the most of opportunities involves a boy named William, who built a wind turbine for his famine-stricken town in Malawi, helping to power small appliances and eventually irrigate crops. Some versions of the story indicate that he read of wind turbines in books, and then found the parts to make one from the junk yard. William is someone who made the most of his opportunities.* A time of thanksgiving is a great time to reassess our opportunities in life and what we have done with them.

A time to consider them in the context of worship

And here in the last verse considered, we note the prevailing attitude for the Christian as we work to construct our lives. Verse 10 "...and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, O Lord, have given me.' Then you shall set it before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God." The word here translated "worship" (there are several in Hebrew) means to bow down...as an act of submission or reverence. The primary meaning is to make oneself low. This is what sets us apart from people simply trying to make some of our lives. We do this for the Lord, and we live for His honor.

Conclusion

Our thanksgiving stories may be different but we do have people who have invested in our lives and helped us. We owe a debt of thanks to the Lord for life itself, and for every opportunity we have. We work to make the most of the opportunities before us not for our own gain but as an act of worship to God, and there is a time for thanksgiving, and the time is now.

*<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/02/the-boy-who-harnessed-the-wind-netflix-review-william-kamkwamba-chiwetel-ejiofor/583720/>