

May 3, 2015

The Good Life –

If I'm not mistaken, we have hats, caps, scarves, head-bands, shirts, jackets, sweaters, jerseys, signs, video news, vines, tweets, parodies (and probably more) that simply say "Obey!"

Why obey? Well, that's a good question and I'm glad you asked it.

A good place to start in answering that question is Deuteronomy Chapter 28, and specifically the first 14 verses:

- ¹ And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe *and* to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth:
- ² And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.
- ³ Blessed *shalt* thou *be* in the city, and blessed *shalt* thou *be* in the field.
- ⁴ Blessed *shall be* the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.
- ⁵ Blessed *shall be* thy basket and thy store.
- ⁶ Blessed *shalt* thou *be* when thou comest in, and blessed *shalt* thou *be* when thou goest out.
- ⁷ The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.
- ⁸ The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.
- ⁹ The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways.

- ¹⁰ And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee.
- ¹¹ And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee.
- ¹² The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow.
- ¹³ And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do *them*:
- ¹⁴ And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, *to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.*

In a word, to obey God's word is to be blessed in the very lives we live every day.

Now, of course, the antithesis is to disregard and reject our Lord's rules, the result of which is to not receive these blessings but instead be cursed. And we need not look far to see what those curses look like; we see them in the people around us every day and it's not a pretty picture! For a good word picture of those curses, simply read the balance of Deuteronomy Chapter 28, verses 15-68. It takes a lot of text to describe those curses. I will leave it to you to read it, but curses set forth in the remainder of Deuteronomy Chapter 28 can be summarized this way:

- Cursed no matter where you live;
- Cursed children;
- Cursed livestock (livelihood);
- Cursed coming and going;
- A pestilence that clings to you and doesn't heal (like consumption, boils, tumors, blindness, madness, scabs, itching, inflammations, burning) – bad health;
- Drought;

- Famine;
- Regular and ongoing losses to your enemies;
- Loss of crops; no return on your work and investments;
- You eat your babies.

Verses near the end of that chapter sum it all up:

- ⁶⁵ And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind:
- ⁶⁶ And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life:
- ⁶⁷ In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.

But enough about the curses; this sermon is about the good life.

Bundle of life:

This phrase comes from 1 Samuel 25:29, **“the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.”** That chapter tells the story of Nabal and Abigail. Nabal rebuffs David’s envoys, scorning David. **“Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse?”** (1 Sam. 25:10). Mocking the Lord’s anointed he jeers “why would I give him and his people food and water”, in so many words. (1 Sam. 25:11). In great rage, David sets out to kill Nabal, but wise-headed Abigail steps in with her “bundle of life” speech.

This “bundle of life” is one of the blessings flowing from obeying. What’s included?

- Safety; picture a bundle or luggage bag that is designed to protect what is being carried. God’s people are protected by the bundle, bound together and wrapped for protection;
- Precious cargo; God’s people are preserved like a diamond in its case;

- Temporary; the bundle is unwrapped in heaven; and,
- Exciting and action-packed; a bundle of activity.

Looking at the definition of “bundle” may help: Several items or materials bound together; wrapped for carrying; a package; a number of things considered together like a “bundle of ideas.”

Another thought included here is “the bond of life.” The life of David – who stands symbolically for all of God’s sheep – is bound up in the purposes of the Most High and therefore in his care and supervision. The actual word “bundle” is *tseror* which means something bound up or enclosed in a bag for safety. **“A bundle of myrrh is my wellbeloved unto me;”** (Song Chapter 1:13); that is, an object of love and devotion to be clasped and held closely. The same word is translated “bag” on occasion. **“He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed.”** (Proverbs 7:20). At Job 14:17 we find these words: **“My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity.”** And from Isaiah 8:16: **“Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.”**

From these and other occurrences in the Bible it is plain that the meaning of “bundle of life” is that of a thing most precious to God which he is preserving carefully and holding close to himself.

Milk and honey:

We find this concept in such verses as Exodus 3:8 **“And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey”** and verse 17 in that same chapter **“And I have said, I will bring you . . . unto a land flowing with milk and honey.”**

This is part of the “obey” blessings, so we take a closer look –

- ✓ Abundance of all things spiritual and physical.
- ✓ Spiritually, God’s word and truth is strong meat for the soul. (Hebrews 5:12).
- ✓ Milk and honey are good for the body’s physiology and well-being. Research reveals the value of milk in areas including bone development, teeth, blood

pressure, cardiovascular disease, weight control, diabetes and cancer. Honey is said to sooth coughs, boost memory, treat wounds, provide vital nutrients, prevent low white blood cell count, relieve seasonal allergies, kill bacteria, resolve scalp and dandruff problems and provide a great workout fuel.

- ✓ Combined, these spiritual and physical benefits result in a life of long days. **“Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it; and that ye may prolong your days in the land, which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that floweth with milk and honey”** (Deuteronomy 11:8, 9) and **“[t]hat your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children.”** (Deuteronomy 11:21).
- ✓ Material wealth such as needed is also intended. **“And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.”** (Deuteronomy 11:13-15).

Manna:

A good place to start when discussing “manna” as part of the good land blessings that flow from obeying are the various verses that describe it, including: **“Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.”** (Exodus 16:4). And from later in that same chapter:

- ¹² I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD your God.
- ¹³ And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host.

- ¹⁴ And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness *there lay* a small round thing, *as small as the hoar frost on the ground.*
- ¹⁵ And when the children of Israel saw *it*, they said one to another, *It is manna*: for they wist not what it *was*. And Moses said unto them, *This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.*
- ¹⁶ *This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents.*
- ¹⁷ And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less.
- ¹⁸ And when they did mete *it* with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating.
- ¹⁹ And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning.
- ²⁰ Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them.
- ²¹ And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted.
- ²² And it came to pass, *that* on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one *man*: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses.

“And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium (reddish brown). And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil. And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it. (Numbers 11:7-9). “And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger . . . and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth.” (Nehemiah 9:15, 20). “Man did eat angels’ food:” (Psalms 78:25). “The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.” (Psalms 105:40).

These verses describe a process that is different from anything found before or since. But it teaches us lessons regarding the good life for those who obey, including –

- To be prudent and diligent in providing food for ourselves and our households; with quietness working and eating our own bread, not the bread of idleness or deceit. Even though manna rained, it still had to be gathered;
- To be content with enough; and,
- To depend on Providence, trusting on God’s daily provisions.

Pillar/Cloud-Fire:

We are first introduced to this aspect of the Obeyers’ blessings in Exodus 13:21: **“And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.”** A succinct account appears in Psalms 78:14: **“In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.”** And again from the Psalms: **“He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night.”** (Psalms 105:39).

A bit later in Exodus, we get more information on this phenomenon in Chapter 14:19, 20: **“And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.”**

The text I just quoted appears in the narrative describing Israel’s deliverance from Egypt in the Red Sea where the Egyptian military drowned while the children of Israel walked unharmed on dry ground. Looking at that passage in such context, then, we can note that the object of the movement of the cloud was two-fold: (1) to check and trouble the Egyptians (i.e. the enemies of the Lord’s people) by engulfing them in “a cloud and darkness”, and (2) to cheer and assist the Israelites (i.e. the Lord’s people) by affording them abundant light and understanding in the middle of battle.

Benson's commentary says it this way: *There (the cloud) was of use to the Israelites, not only to protect them, but to light them through the sea; and at the same time it confounded the Egyptians, so that they lost sight of their prey just when they were ready to lay hands on it. The word and providence of God have a black and dark side toward sin and sinners, but a bright and pleasant side toward those that are Israelites indeed.*

And Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary adds these helpful thoughts: *The slow and silent movement of that majestic column through the air, and occupying a position behind them must have excited the astonishment of the Israelites. It was an effectual barrier between them and their pursuers, not only protecting them, but concealing their movements. Thus, the same cloud produced light (a symbol of favor) to the people of God, and darkness (a symbol of wrath) to their enemies.*

I dare say this church has experienced these types of deliverances an untold number of times, and they are doubtless a component of the blessings that flow from obeying God. We can experientially feel Nehemiah's words: **"Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go."** (Nehemiah 9:19). I would therefore join with Paul saying **"brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea."** (1 Corinthians 10:1). And it was another watermark of the blessed and good life the people of God enjoy as a direct result of obeying his word.

I love you!