

“Preservation in the Wilderness”
(Deuteronomy 8:1-6)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we considered something else the Lord did to serve the cause of redemption:
He shortened man’s lifespan.
 - a. Before the Flood, man lived to be nearly 1000; but afterwards, his years were eventually cut down to about one-twelfth of that time.
 - b. We might be tempted simply to chalk it up to something that happened around that time frame:
 - (i) Perhaps some change in the environment – such as the removal of the “vapor canopy.”
 - (ii) Or perhaps to the progressive effects of sin – certainly sin’s degenerative power could be the cause, but that wouldn’t explain why our lives haven’t declined to less than 70-80 years by now.
2. We saw it wasn’t an accident – as nothing in this world ultimately is – it was a part of God’s plan.
 - a. We know that most people don’t covet a shorter life expectancy, but God intended it for several good reasons:
 - (i) It makes us think about eternal things more than if we lived longer.
 - (ii) It also makes us value those things more than we would otherwise.
 - (iii) This has the effect of preparing our hearts more readily to receive the Gospel.
 - (a) If you knew you would live to be 950, wouldn’t it make you more relaxed about getting ready for death? We wouldn’t be near even the prime of our lives.
 - (b) But if, on the other hand, you had a terminal disease that was threatening to take your life in one to two months, you would be thinking more carefully about whether you’re ready to stand before the Lord.
 - (c) This is perhaps one of the reasons the Antediluvians became so wicked: they didn’t think they needed to take Noah seriously; they had so much time left.
 - (d) When you know your life is short, you pay more attention to the things that have to do with life after death.
 - b. One thing we didn’t consider is the blessing a short life is to a believer.
 - (i) The shorter our lives, the less time we’ll have to wait to see the Lord, to be in His presence.
 - (ii) If we’re not as excited about this as we should be, it’s only because we need to grow more in grace.
 - (iii) The more mature we are, the more we’ll desire to be with Christ, as Paul’s testimony has reminded us on many occasions (Phil. 1:23).

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we're going to consider another miracle the Lord did to advance His work of redemption, which is very timely for us: that of His sustaining His people in the wilderness for forty years.
 - a. It's timely because of our economy.
 - (i) Even in the best of times, riches are uncertain, which is why we should never put our trust in them.
 - (ii) Solomon writes, "Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies *toward the heavens*" (Prov. 23:4-5).
 - b. Our passage reminds us not to look to money or to our economy to meet our needs, but to the Lord, because He has promised to take care of us.
2. What we'll consider now is the forty year miracle by which the Lord preserved His people in the wilderness.

II. Sermon.

- A. Another thing the Lord did to promote the work of redemption was to preserve the nation from whom Jesus was to come through a constant miracle for forty years in the wilderness.
 1. The fact that the Lord preserved His people is not a new idea; we've already seen Him do this again and again in His unfolding plan to bring His Son into the world.
 - a. When the earth had become universally wicked, and Noah was the only righteous man left, the Lord destroyed the world in order to preserve Noah and to continue His work (Gen. 6-8).
 - b. After the Flood, He again protected His people and His work by dividing the people of the world into several different languages at the tower of Babel (Gen. 11).
 - c. He continually guarded Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, along with their families, from the inhabitants of Canaan to move His plan forward.
 - d. When Jacob was on his way back to Canaan from Paddan-aram, the Lord protected him from his brother Esau and Esau's small army of four hundred men (Gen. 32-33).
 - e. And, of course, the Lord miraculously preserved His people through the famine by sending Joseph into Egypt to interpret the dream He would give Pharaoh, bringing about Joseph's rise to power as second in command and Israel's deliverance.
 2. Now the Lord did something even more remarkable: He provided for and preserved His people in the wilderness for forty years.
 - a. We realize that the Lord does this all the time for His whole Creation.
 - (i) He is the One who causes the rain to fall and the sun to shine on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45), and who causes the earth to yield food for all His creatures (Psalm 104).
 - (ii) We call this His ordinary Providence: we don't even think about it because we're so used to it; but if He ever stopped providing – as He does when He brings famine – we would notice it.
 - b. This was different: He suspended His ordinary laws of Providence to provide for His people. When He does this, we call it a miracle.
 - (i) There were perhaps two million people in Jacob's family by this time.

- (ii) To survive, they needed food and water, without which every one of them would have died within a month:
 - (a) Although it's hard to imagine, you can survive without food for about 30-40 days.
 - (b) Without water, you might survive for 10 days – if the temperature was between 50 – 70 degrees – but only for 2-5 days if the temperature exceeds 100.
 - (c) They were in the barren wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula, which is hot and dry.
 - (iii) But the Lord provided for them and preserved them for forty years!
 - (a) They had no land for sowing or reaping – they had to keep moving and couldn't plant or harvest – but the Lord provided manna, the bread of heaven, angel's food, on a daily basis.
 - (1) Remember, the Lord orchestrated it so that they would have to gather the manna every day – if they kept it for more than one day, it would spoil and breed worms (Ex. 16:20). He did this so they would look to Him every day in faith for His gracious provision.
 - (2) He gave them twice as much on the sixth day of the week, so they wouldn't need to gather it on the seventh, that they might observe the Sabbath.
 - (b) He also continually supplied them with water from a rock – a rock that apparently followed them throughout their journeys (1 Cor. 10:4).
 - (c) The Lord even preserved their clothes so that what they were wearing when they came out of Egypt didn't wear out for forty years.
 - c. The Lord had never done anything like this before.
 - (i) He had provided food for a large number of His creatures when He fed Noah, his family, and the animals in the ark for an entire year; but He did this by warning them in advance and having them store it up.
 - (ii) He provided food supernaturally for Elijah when He commanded the ravens (scavenging birds) to provide his food, while giving him drink from a brook (1 Kings 17:6). But this was for one person and for a short period of time.
 - (iii) Here He provided for a whole nation for four decades: He did it that He might bring the Promised Seed, the Messiah, into the world through the seed of Abraham, as He promised.
- B. In closing, let's consider two possible applications:
1. First, as God provided for His people to bring His Son into the world, so He provides for His people who belong to His Son.
 - a. The Lord has redeemed you at a very high cost – the blood of His Son.
 - b. Having given so much to have you, do you think He will leave you to fend for yourselves? No.
 - (i) The Lord loves you and has promised to provide for you.
 - (ii) Consider what Jesus tells you in His Sermon on the Mount, “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than

food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:25-34). Don’t we often worry because we’re afraid that we’re not going to have these things? Jesus tells you not to worry.

- (iii) Paul tells us that we shouldn’t worry about anything, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).
- (iv) You don’t need to worry. The Lord has given you His promise. You simply need to trust Him.

2. Second, let’s not forget why the Lord has made these promises:

- a. First, because He loves you and has given you to His Son: This is why Jesus takes care of you:
 - (i) Remember, He was the One who preserved His people in the wilderness – He provided the manna and the water.
 - (ii) But He was also the One pictured by that food – that if you eat of Him spiritually, you will live.
 - (iii) If the Lord has been careful to provide you with eternal life through His Son, will He not also give you everything else you need to live and glorify Him on earth? He will because His is your Mediator.
 - (a) You are His reward, His treasured ones, that His Father has given to Him for laying down His life for you.
 - (b) He is the One who is your surety, your guarantee that you will survive and inherit the promises.
 - b. Second, He also does this, as our text reminds us, to move your hearts to love and gratitude so that you will obey His commandments.
 - (i) The Lord humbled His people in the wilderness so they would realize that everything they need comes from God.
 - (ii) The Lord wants you to realize that all your blessedness comes from Him as well.
 - (iii) And so remember who is blessing you and why, and humble yourself before the Lord by submitting entirely to His will, and His blessings will be increased.
- Amen.