

Everything that Goes Out of the Mouth of the Lord

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Thanksgiving Eve, November 23, 2011

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

It is difficult to interpret the circumstances of our lives. When something bad happens to us we ask ourselves, "Why?" When something good happens to us we tend not to ask that question however if we are going to be consistent about things we should also ask, "Why?" I think that the reason that we often do not try to figure out why good things happen to us is because we think we know why they happen to us. When something bad happens we try to figure it out because we figure that we don't know why something bad would happen to us. Maybe that is because we try to take credit for the good stuff, but not the bad stuff. I don't know. At any rate it is difficult to interpret the circumstances of our lives.

Sometimes something bad happens to us and it is our fault. If a man is lazy and does not do his work, the Lord may decree that his employer fire him. Once he is fired, he no longer has an income. He defaults on his loans, files for bankruptcy and a number of other bad things happen to him. He may even become homeless. Such a person gets what they deserve. The bad things that happened to him are decreed by the Lord to teach him to work hard at his next job or something similar will happen to him.

Sometimes, we lose the job through no fault of our own. Think of all of the hard working men and women who lost their jobs in the recent recession. Their employers had money invested in the housing market. When that money proved unreliable their investment returns dried up. They no longer had the money to pay their employees. They had to let people go. Those people who were let go had trouble finding other jobs because many employers and even the government were having the same problem. They defaulted on their loans. They wound up in poverty. The same kinds of events afflicted them as afflicted the lazy man in my first illustration. This time though it was not their fault. They were hard working individuals. They showed up on time. They put in their hours. They did what was required of them. They still wound up in the same position as the lazy man.

The Scriptures teach us that when such things happen the Lord is testing us. He wants to know whether or not we will keep His commandments even though bad things are happening to us. He wants to build up our character by challenging our faith in Him so that it will grow. We grow our muscles by challenging them and tearing them so that when they heal they regrow stronger than they were before. God does the same thing to our faith. He tears our faith by sending calamity into it in order that when it regrows it regrows stronger than it was before. God takes the risk of alienating us to make us better and more faithful people.

The Lord is even subtle enough to be able to do both of these things simultaneously. In other words it is possible that when something bad happens that the Lord is both disciplining you for something that you did wrong and He is also testing you to strengthen your faith. These are not mutually exclusive examples. Many of you know that your lives are complicated enough that most events are a combination of your fault and the circumstances that God provides.

In either case, whether God is disciplining you for something that you did that was wrong or the Lord is testing you to see whether or not you will keep His commandments and to strengthen your faith, everything depends on the decree of the Lord. Everything depends on what goes forth from the Lord's mouth. If He decrees poverty for you, it will come.

Similar things can be said of blessings.

Sometimes a person receives a blessing because they worked hard. They put in their time. They put in their hours. They work hard for their employer. As a result the employer rewards them with higher pay and promotions. Or if a person is building their own business God may reward their hard work and risk with a good reputation and people who want to purchase their good or service. God may reward them with a market for the good or service that they provide. It is possible for a person to provide a good or service that no one wants. God rewards some people for their hard work simply to encourage them to continue to work hard.

The book of Proverbs makes this point over and over again. The lazy man will find himself in poverty in a moment, but the hard working man has nothing to fear from a day of want. He has plenty stored up for himself.

Now it must be said that God does not always give blessings to people who deserve them. We expect the hard working man to receive a just reward for his labor, but we all know people who have received blessings who did not deserve them.

A good example that comes to mind is Peter when he first encountered Jesus. Peter had just spent the night fishing. He had caught nothing. The next day Jesus asks him to go out and fish again. Peter explains that they had fished all night and had caught nothing, but he agreed to go out anyway. The catch of fish was so large that the boats began to sink under the weight of the catch. Then Peter turns to Jesus and says, "Away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." What an odd reaction. He did not give thanks and praise to Jesus. He instead confessed his sins. Here is Peter literally hip deep in the blessings of God and he is not thanking or praising. He is rather confessing.

Sometimes God can discipline us to within an inch of our lives and we will not confess any wrongdoing. We are like the young boy whose father spans him, but he refuses to show that it hurts. No matter how hard the father spans him he doesn't show any reaction. He takes pride when the father breaks his paddle across his bottom because it means that he won.

Sometimes God moves us to confess our sins by giving us a blessing that He knows that we know that we don't deserve it. So when you have had a particularly bad year spiritually speaking and yet you get a good yield and a good price anyway and make more than year than the years that you did when you were doing better spiritually speaking, then you know that God is good to His people in spite of their sins. And that often moves you to confess your sins more than anything else would.

Once again as with poverty so also with blessings God is subtle enough that He can both reward hard work and bless people in spite of their sins at the same time. We can learn to work hard and we can learn that God is good to us in spite of our sins at the same time.

And once again the wealth that we have is decreed by God. If we are blessed because God is rewarding us for our hard work it is a decree of God that we are blessed. And if we are blessed in spite of our sins, it is a decree of God that we are blessed in spite of our sins. Either way we live on everything that comes out of the mouth of the Lord.

Telling which is which is hard to do. How do we know when God is punishing or rewarding us for something that we have done? How do we know when God is trying to strengthen our faith through persecution or get us to confess our sins by blessing us? I honestly don't have any neat little principles to give you in this sermon that you could easily go home and apply to your lives. It depends on a hundred different little circumstances in your life. If you want to do an analysis for you personally come and see me. It would be interesting to try.

What it does mean is that sometimes people receive blessings who do not deserve it. Sometimes people receive poverty who do not seem to deserve it. Because of our sins we all deserve poverty, but

some people do not seem to deserve it, but they receive it anyway. Either way it is because of the decree of God. It is because of what comes out of His mouth. And this should not surprise us. The universe was created at His decree. He said, "Let there be," and there it was. When God was incarnate on the earth He told Peter to go out for a catch and a catch was there waiting for him. It because God said, "Go out for a catch," that the catch was there.

We exist because of the goings forth of the mouth of the Lord. Certainly our blessings are because of His going forth also. And even if we find ourselves in poverty, whether it is discipline or for testing, it is for our good. That means that everything that comes out of the mouth of the Lord is for our good. That means that He is always deserving of our praise and thanksgiving.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.