



Sermon: Sunday, February 18, 2024

“Bow Down and Worship”

SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 26:1-11 ¹ “When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess and you possess it and settle in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.’ ⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the LORD your God: ‘A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷ we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression ⁸ The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.’ You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹ Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

Introduction: The Law of the First Fruits

Today is the first week of Lent in the church calendar. Today’s text is Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is Moses’ farewell will and sermon for the Israelites about to enter Canaan. Moses’ greatest achievement in the history of Israel was that he established the national foundation of the Israelites through the Exodus. Additionally, Moses led the Israelites during their 40 years in the wilderness. During the Israelites’ wilderness life, the law was completed, and the tabernacle, the prototype of the Jerusalem temple, was created. In Deuteronomy, Moses’ farewell sermon contains various regulations. One of many such regulations appears in today’s text, Deuteronomy 26:1-11.

It is a regulation regarding the first fruits from the produce of the land. The Israelites must offer the first fruits they get from farming in Canaan to God. However, the first fruits must not be offered simply, but must be offered through a ritual. This is a kind of worship.

The Israelites must bring their first fruits in a basket to the temple and say to the priest: **“Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.” (verse 3).** When the priest receives the basket and places it on the altar, the Israelites who offer the first fruits of the land must tell God the story of Israel’s history, which the ancient Israelites heard repeatedly and repeatedly told to their descendants.

What the Israelites said was that, as wandering Aramean people, they entered Egypt and lived as a minority. They were mistreated and appealed to God, and God liberated them from the oppression of Egypt and led them to Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. And it says that the first fruits of farming on that land were brought to offer to God. In today’s terms, this is a kind of prayer and hymn. After offering these prayers



and hymns, the Israelites must place a basket containing the first fruits of the land in front of them and worship God. So, why did the Israelites worship God?

Body: God who rules and governs history!

The answer of the ancient Israelites to this question is that God is the one who controls and governs history. In other words, they thought that their life and death were in God's hands. In fact, not only today's text but the entire Old Testament is an explanation of this fact and the confession of the Israelites.

The reason we read the Old Testament, which is the story of the Israelites with different backgrounds in time and space, is to learn that God controls history and provides providence through the perspectives of the Israelites. So why is this learning and knowledge important?

This is because a life that recognizes, feels, and experiences God and a life that does not are completely different lives and bring completely different results to us. So the Bible constantly tells us to worship God. God's control and providence over history also means that God determines our survival and destiny.

However, many people do not clearly recognize and experience this fact. Because this is not something we can check with our eyes and hands. So many people's religious lives are always up and down. The Israelites were no different from us. It was difficult for them to confirm that God was with them, so they worshiped Baal, an idol that symbolized wealth and fertility.

However, we cannot be unconditionally hostile to this type of Baal worship because we need materials to live. So, it is good if the business is doing well, and the church's finances are strong. Also, it is good to study well and it is important to gain social status. Christians must play a role that can produce achievements in each area. Because we cannot cut off everything from the world and go into a monastery and just pray.

Nevertheless, the Old Testament prophets considered Baal worship a sin that needed to be eliminated first. The reason they thought so was because they ultimately thought that idolatry undermines our faith in God. Idolatry had to be eradicated because if our faith in God is damaged, the foundation of our lives will collapse.

So where and how can we confirm that God is the ultimate foundation of our survival and destiny? Also, unlike the Israelites who fell into idolatry, how did Moses and other prophets experience God's providence?

The answer is found in today's text. That is through the history of Israel. So the Israelites repeatedly narrate their history. As we look at the Israelites' journey from Exodus to Canaan, we realize that there is no way to explain it other than God's providence. It was impossible for Israel to escape Egypt, the most powerful country at the time. Also, it was a miracle that millions of people safely crossed the Red Sea while Egyptian soldiers were chasing them. Furthermore, it is a miraculous story that the Israelites were able to preserve their lives without dying during 40 years of wilderness life.

But what we must realize is that each of our lives is also a series of miracles. I believe that my life from the moment I was born until now is a miracle. This does not mean that I have experienced any amazing miracle, but that the entire process of eating, drinking, and living so far has been a miraculous event that cannot be explained without God.

Of course, there may be people who disagree with my thoughts. Those who do not know God probably have different thoughts about the source of life than I do. Some Christians may not agree with what I say. Perhaps these thoughts are even greater if they are currently facing suffering. Because, if God led our lives with good will, we might think, how could our lives be so painful?

In fact, Job in the Old Testament also thought so. Job felt that his life was so painful that he would rather die than live like this. However, Job admits that his thoughts were lacking after experiencing God. **Job 42:5 says: 'I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.'**



Therefore, the thought that we cannot believe in God because of our unhappy lives is evidence that we are setting the standards for happiness and unhappiness upon ourselves. However, although we want to believe in and worship God through the things God has done in our lives, it doesn't work out. This is because solving the problem of making a living is overwhelming for us and we live busy lives for it.

The best way to get out of this situation is to restore our spirituality in worship. This is because the 'mystery of history' in which God's providence is involved is compressed in worship. So, although it varies depending on the individual, it is beneficial for one's religious life to attend worship services at least once a week. It is also good to teach such habits to our children.

I say this because it is important for our lives to experience the fact that God is the fundamental foundation of our lives, and this is confirmed in the form of worship.

Our church holds Holy Communion once a month. The Eucharist is the center of worship. Bread and wine are placed on the communion table. I break the bread and place it in the hands of the believers. When I say, '**This is the body of Jesus,**' the person who receives it says, '**Amen.**' This seemingly simple act is a sacred ritual.

When we participate in the Holy Communion, we do not simply remember the sacrifice and love that the Lord died for us on the cross, but we re-experience the sacrifice and love of Jesus in our present life. Also, in the process, we once again realize our essential sinfulness and respond to the Lord's boundless grace. And that present response guides us to live a practical life toward God and neighbors. Furthermore, through the Holy Communion, we experience Jesus coming on the last day and his promise being realized through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The worship represented by the Holy Communion includes not only our relationship with God but also our relationship with people. This is because we not only become one with God through Jesus Christ, but also with other people through Jesus Christ. This is not simply a doctrine, but a power that makes the lives of individuals and communities healthy. We come to the Eucharist as equal children of the Lord, regardless of money, status, honor, gender, race, nationality, or religion.

Conclusion: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

Today's text, **Deuteronomy 26:11**, says: "**Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.**" In this verse, "**celebrate with all the bounty**" contains the true meaning of almsgiving. In fact, charity is not simply about helping those in need; it is the practice of faith that all are one in God. This is the theological meaning of the Eucharist that I mentioned above.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today, people ignore or feel awkward about the words to worship the Lord. Luke 4:1-13 tells the story of Jesus being tested three times. In the second test, the devil tempted Jesus by showing him worldly authority and glory and saying that he would give it all to him if he bowed down to him. Jesus answered by quoting **Deuteronomy 6:13**: '**The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear.**'

I encourage you. Please immerse yourself in worshiping the Lord during Lent. You will gain true peace of your soul through the Lord, the source of life.

