

**THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS**  
**April 23, 2017 Morning Service**  
**Deuteronomy 9:1-6**

That's a pretty good country choir right there. I'll tell you right now. Amen. That sounded great. Thanks for picking that song. I know you didn't know what I was preaching on today because I didn't and I didn't tell you but, man, how that fits with where I'm going today.

I had planned after Easter to do an exposition for a few weeks from the 40<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah and I'm going to get to that in a few weeks but I just have not been able to get away from what God's been stirring in my heart in the book of Deuteronomy. I've been told all my life in athletics, if I've heard it once, I've heard it several hundred times. Get your head up. You know, you mess up and you'll just be kind of down, you know. Get your head up. Well then look up and let's – let me tell you, God doesn't tell you to get your head up. The Bible says in Psalm 3, He lifts your head. When you can't even lift yourself, God lifts your head. He becomes your shield. He lifts you up. Thank God He's the lifter of my head. He puts that back into my life.

Well life is indeed a pilgrimage and there are times when we get our head down. This is a low time for some people. I talked with a family yesterday. I talked with them four months ago and doctors had said they weren't sure about the baby. They were having twins and one child is now living and doing fine. The other one was in trouble and died this week, just not long after birth. It's a journey. Sometimes you get your head down. Last Sunday my good friend, Jerry Bowman, sat in this service and listened to me preach and was here and went home. Easter Sunday night he had a stroke. On Thursday he stepped from this side to the next side. I'm telling you, life is a pilgrimage. It's a journey. It's got mountains and valleys. It's got straight roads and crooked roads. It's got sideways and highways but life is a pilgrimage.

You're on it. Some of you are walking on the straight and narrow road that leads to everlasting life and some of you are on a broad way that's going to end you in hell but you're on a pilgrimage. All through scripture we find that the Christian life is a journey. It has a beginning and it has an end and we walk that highway. It's what Bunyan called *The Pilgrim's Progress* and I have stolen his book title as my sermon title today.

In Deuteronomy chapter 9 we see one of the pictures that is used especially in Hebrews 3. For the pilgrimage, the journey, that journey is the children of Israel. You remember they were taken captive in Egypt. They've gone down and wound up there and in slavery. After those many years God called them out with Moses and they left Egypt, went into the wilderness, wandered around what ought to have been a few days' journey and it took them a generation. Finally going in across the Jordan to Canaan.

Now I love southern gospel music too but southern gospel music's wrong. Canaan is not heaven. There are no wars in heaven. Canaan is the spirit-filled life

when you read the word of God. There is a place where you find that is going home and we're bound for the Promised Land. I understand that but the promise is on this side. It's the spirit-filled life and that is exactly what Deuteronomy is describing for us in that *deuteronomos*. *Deutero* being two; *nomos*, law. The second giving of the law is Deuteronomy and in that he tells this story again. As you read your Bible you'll hear it over and over and over about the pilgrimage of God's people of which you should be one. Deuteronomy 9, beginning in verse 1 we read these words:

*"Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven [He's talking like a Baptist preacher now. He's saying that the walls are all the way to heaven. That means they're tall.], a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you have heard it said, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?' Know therefore today that it is the LORD your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the LORD has spoken to you.*

*"Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*

*"Know, then, it is not [Are you getting the picture that is not because of our righteousness? It's the goodness of God. Verse 6. Know, then it is not] because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.<sup>1</sup>*

In spite of us, God brings us into the Promised Land, into the spirit-filled life. Now get the picture. Egypt is a picture of our lostness, bound in slavery to sin as the natural man. We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We all are born in Egypt. We are all born in slavery to sin. That's lostness but God has called us out, out of Egypt on a pilgrimage toward Canaan. Canaan is the spiritual man who passes the death river of Jordan into fullness and fruitfulness. The death river, not of the physical death, but of your spiritual death. You must die to yourself as you pass through the Jordan to enter into Canaan and it's only then that you are faithful and fruitful as you're dead to yourself.

Our problem is that many of us are like the children of Israel in the wilderness 40 years, carnal Christians who never move past the initial experience of stepping out of Egypt. We're saved. We got out of Egypt. God drew us but now He's called us on this pilgrim's progress, on this journey to sanctification, leading one day to glorification but

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we like Israel get hung up in the wilderness. That's what happened to our forefathers and it's there as a picture for us. We've got to move through.

How many people – I'm just curious today. How many of you in this room have ever read John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*? Can I see your hand? Just wave at me. I want to see your hand. Okay. This used to be the most read book in the church other than the Bible. If you've never read Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* or you've never read John Bunyan's biography, I encourage you to read it. I went and got me a new biography of John Bunyan this week. Now don't tell anybody but I went to the Bible Baptist Bookstore where Peter Ruckman was the pastor and they stand on the side of the road and preach to us. I have some friends, they live around me, and I'd never been in that bookstore. I've been here 26 years plus and lived right down the road and never been but I went in.

I have to admit that I did make Dr. Lewis go in there one time because Dr. Ruckman had written a book that I wanted but I would not go in and buy it myself. I made Stan go in and buy it. I dropped him and drove around the block and came back and picked him up. I was just looking for a Bunyan biography so I went in and I bought a new biography of John Bunyan, a great little volume that I've read about half of the last few days.

Bunyan was a wicked man. He fought in the civil war in England with Cromwell. He sided with Parliament against the king. Later that would land him in jail for 14 years before he penned *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He could barely read but reading was his physical savior. Bunyan married and he and his wife had a little girl born blind. They later would have a young son named John. The little girl, Mary, blind.

Bunyan was a tinker. He fixed pots and pan. That's what he did. His father taught him how to do it. In order to make more money he moved to a larger town of Bedford. There in Bedford he met four women. Those four women were talking about Christ. They invited him to church. Do you know that from that day and before and from that day forward, God does most of his evangelism through one person telling another person how to find Jesus? Some people get saved in a vision but most people get saved when somebody, you talk to somebody then and invite them to know more of the gospel.

They invited old John down to church and he met the pastor and the pastor began to preach and introduce him to Christ. Bunyan was saved and God called him to preach. He started preaching and England was divided and when the king, Charles I, came back in to rule, that if you were going to be a member of the church you had to be a member of the state church and if you weren't a member of the state church and you're preaching in a church outside of the state church you could be arrested. That's what happened to John Bunyan. They put him in jail for 12 years. He got out and they arrested him and he went back in for two more. He spent 14 years in jail and when he got out the last time he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*. If you've never read *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it's not an easy book to read but I encourage you to read it.

In that book he goes to places like the hill of difficulty. He goes to vanity fair. He goes to the country of conceit. Those things get in his way of getting to the Promised Land. Now I know none of you struggle with the country of conceit, being conceited, pride. You've got to get over that. Vanity fair, things that are just vain to us. He said he went to the town of vanity and they were having a fair and there was vanity fair. They have a whole magazine about that now. Bunyan first wrote about it, a place called vanity fair.

He talked about the hill of difficulty and how so many times you're going along just fine and all of a sudden, it's just straight up. Have you ever been there? Sure you have. We all have. If we're going to go into the Promised Land, we have to deal with those places as well as many others that he outlines.

Not only does he have hard places, he meets difficult people. He meets the formalist. He meets some of these people in church. In this book that is just a picture for us, it's a novel, he meets the formalist. You know, that's the guy in church that never smiles or sings. He's just formal. Don't let anything move you. The formalist got in Bunyan's way. Then there's the flatterer. He meets the flatterer. He'll tell you, oh, everything's fine. You're going to be the next Billy Graham. He runs into hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is really hard. Christian is the guy's name but everybody believes that it was Bunyan writing about himself, just telling his own story of this progress.

Friends, hear me. If you're going to walk with Jesus there will always be barriers and there will always be battles. Always. Those barriers are found right here in chapter 9 and verse 1. Look at those barriers. He said to Israel. You're crossing over the Jordan today. You're going to go in and dispossess the nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven. Friend, there are barriers that we all face. James chapter 4 and verse 4 tells us about that. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Don't you know that? That's a question mark. Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. That's the barrier.

When you love the world, you miss Canaan. When you love the world, you miss Canaan. You'll never walk in spirit-filledness eating the carnival foods of vanity fair. Those barriers are there. We face them every day. We must choose. Are we going to be an earth dweller or a heaven dweller? Are you an earth dweller or a heaven dweller? I'm not telling you, don't ever have fun. You don't ever do good things that you enjoy. I'm just simply telling you, friend, your eyes are either on earth as an earth dweller or your eyes are on heaven as a heaven dweller. If you're a heaven dweller you're living on earth just passing through. You're on a pilgrimage. You're on a journey.

There are barriers. Then there are battles. Oh my Lord we have to fight battles. Look at chapter 9 and verse 2, this crowd that he ran up to, great and tall, the sons of Anakim. Many people believe that these people were related to the Nepheline over in

the time of the flood. They certainly were part of the group that was going to be there with Goliath and David's crowd whom you know and of whom you heard it said. "Who can stand before the sons of Anakim?" These are huge, great and tall.

Let me tell you, we face enemies and we'll fight the battles and there are three battlefronts we fight found in I John 2:16. It tells us: *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.* That's the fight you'll fight every day. If you're going to walk in spirit-filledness you will fight the lust of your flesh, the lust of your eyes, and the boastful pride of your own life. It's either look at me or look at Jesus. You must decide if it's all about you or all about Him. Friend, you'll never make Canaan if it's all about you. If it's just what you can get and the lust of your eyes and the lust of your flesh and you're boastful. You'll never make Canaan. I'm not talking about heaven. I'm talking about living in spiritual victory.

While we're in these battles and facing these barriers, I've got some good news today. I want to show you three promises of God for every pilgrim on the journey. God gives us three promises out of this text. Here's what God says to us.

Number one, if you're walking as a pilgrim and progressing and if you're walking toward and in fullness, after you come to the Jordan and you die to yourself, you've been saved and you come and say, "I'm dead to me. I surrender all." You say it however you want to but you've sold out to Christ. Let me tell you, when you come to that lordship place where He's King of kings and Lord of lords and above all and He's your everything, when Jesus is your everything God promises you first of all a continual presence, a continual presence, God's continual presence. He will never leave you. Amen. He's that friend that's closer than anybody. Your wife may leave you. Your kids may turn their back on you. Your church may kick you out but let me tell you, if you're walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God, He never leaves you.

Chapter 9, verse 3 says, "Know today it is the Lord your God who is crossing over before you." He goes before you. We know that in Israel's day He went as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He never left them. Whether it was daylight or dark, He was always there. Let me tell you, friend, when you're walking with God, I care not what barrier you face, I care not what battle you go into, God is with you. If your husband comes to church on Easter and dies, I'm telling you, God's with you. If your little baby dies in infancy, I'm telling you – I talked to that daddy. He so thrilled me this week. He said, "Pastor, we're going to be fine. Just like we prayed in your office, God's got us." I said, "Lord, he's got more faith than his pastor's got." That dear young daddy walking through. God never puts more on you than He can stand. He'll put more on you than you can stand. He'll never put more on you than he can stand. It's his presence with us.

Friend, He never leaves you. You walk with Him and He never, ever leaves you. I hear it all the time. I have people – I'll hear it tomorrow at Jerry's funeral, I guarantee you. We'll bury Mr. Bowman and I'll hear it. They'll walk up and say, "Pastor, I just

don't know how people do this that don't know the Lord." I'll hear that at every funeral. What do they mean by that? Well they mean that God's with us. He's seeing us through. When a Brady's house burns down, God's with us, isn't He? Amen. I'm telling you, walk through. Brother Wayne, when you lose a daughter He's with us, isn't He? It doesn't make it easy. I'm just telling you, He never leaves you. He goes before you and He knows what's coming before you get to the bump in the road.

Listen to Hebrews 13, verses 5 and 6. I love this. Hebrews 13:5. Look at this. You'll see it on the screen. *"Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you [look at verse 6],"* so that we confidently say, *"The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"* Blessed be the name of the Lord. That's God's promise. I never leave you. I never forsake you. Put that verse 5 back up there, Sharon. Look at this. Don't miss this. God says this to you. Read this out loud. This is God's word. Read this with me, just the part there that's in bold. *"I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you."* He's in it to the end. It's a continual presence. Now that doesn't excite you if you're an earth dweller. Friend, if you're a heaven dweller then He's the one that matters and He promises His continual presence. No matter how hot the fire, He never deserts you and He never forsakes you.

Secondly, not only do we see God's continual presence, we see God's continual protection. His protection. Look at it right here in chapter 9 and verse 3. He said, "Know today that it's the Lord your God who's crossing over before you and He's going like a consuming fire." Oh yeah, over in Hebrews 12 we find the scripture says, "He is a consuming fire."

Protection. Friend, if you're walking with God you get ready. Attacks are coming. Those attacks come in varied ways. Sometimes they come in the darkness of night. Sometimes it just comes at you and it's so wicked and dark. I watched a video yesterday online that people had made in Michigan where a House of Representatives was having one of those meetings, you know how they come home and they have the gathering. The Michigan Representative elected to the U.S. House – in fact, I was told he was the highest military ranking person ever elected to the House of Representatives, ask a pastor to pray and while praying, people in the congregation stood up in that town hall meeting. While the preacher is praying, they started chanting, "Separation of church and state, separation of church and state." They chanted that the whole time the preacher prayed.

Now I don't want to talk to you this morning about that political issue. I've talked to you about it before but you just get ready. There are times people will just bold face out of dark wickedness come against you. I'm here to tell you, you're just a wicked individual if you can't stand in a public hall and when an elected official wants to have somebody pray that you can't shut your mouth long enough for somebody to pray. It's just idiocy. It's lunacy but that's the world we live in. If you're going to stand for God – I was proud of that preacher. I don't know who he was. I'm going to Michigan here in

about four weeks and preach at an evangelism conference. I hope that boy's a Baptist and he comes to that meeting. I was just amazed. He just prayed through.

I'm here to tell you, God'll protect you. Sometimes it comes just like dark wickedness. There are other times He comes like a lion. He'll try to kill you. There are other times that the Bible says the devil comes like an angel of light. He may sit next to you in church and look just like a member. Sometimes he comes that way. No matter the attack, God protects us.

Hear the word of the Lord. Four scriptures I want you to hear today. Look at Romans 8:37. *But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.* We are more than conquerors. Amen. That means we win. Hallelujah. James 4:7: *Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will [He'll do what?] flee from you.* I John 4:4. *You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater [greater, greater] is He who is in you than he who is in the world.* Can I get an Amen? Yes, sir. II Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 14. *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph [How often? Always leads us in triumph] in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.*

I'm telling you, He'll protect you if you'll trust Him. If you'll walk the journey, He is present. If you'll walk the journey, He protects. Hallelujah. Not only does He promise His continual presence, His continual protection, hear me today. For the believer who's come out of Egypt walking through the wilderness, crossing the chilly Jordan of self, death, dying to self and entering in to the Canaan's Promised Land. Those that enter into that fullness, not only does He promise His continual presence, His continual protection, He promises His continual provision. He will provide what you need.

When you go back in Deuteronomy but back up one chapter, in chapter 8, verses 7, 8, and 9, listen. Here's what the Lord said to His people in Deuteronomy 8, verse 7: *For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.*

He was sending them into a Promised Land, a Canaan land, a land of provision. I don't know what you need today but I'm here to tell you, Jesus is the provider. Some of you think that if your parents ever die and leave you something, they're going to be your provider. No. The locusts can eat that in 30 seconds. God's your provider. Hear the word of the Lord in Romans chapter 8 and verse 32. *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?* If He gave us Jesus He'll provide everything we need. Amen? He is the great provider when we walk with Him.

I Corinthians 2:9, one of the misappropriated, misquoted verses in all the world. It has absolutely zero, nothing to do with heaven. *"Things which eye has not seen and*

*ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.*” Friend, He’s going to show you that now. That’s not on the other side. I know eye has not seen and ear has not heard but I’m telling you, when you read the context of this verse, there are things you’ve never seen here He’s going to show you. There are things you never heard here He’s going to give you. That’s His provision. Our problem is we like what we can see and what we can hear. God’s got a completely different vision and different tune. What you’ve not seen or heard never even entered your mind God prepared for you. It’s a fullness. It’s a joy. It’s a glory.

Colossians 2:9-10 probably says it better than any other verse. *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.* It’s in Him. We say it all the time but don’t miss this. Jesus is sufficient period, end of sentence, nothing else needed. It’s in Him. When you’re in Him, you’re complete. You’ve got everything you need because He’s over every rule and every authority. He will provide.

Alright. That’s God’s promise so what do we do about His promise? So here’s the sermon. Turn one page in your Bible. It’s pretty easy. This is where I turned to preach this message this week. Deuteronomy 10. When I got to the next chapter, chapter 10 verse 12 the Bible says: *Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you* [Remember he asked that in Micah 6:8 too. What does the Lord require of you? Well he says it a little different here but it’s basically the same. What’s the Lord require of you? God says, “That’s what I’m going to do but now what do I require from the people on the pilgrimage?”], *but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?*

Now listen. If you’ll ever learn to love God with all your heart and all your soul, if you’ll ever learn to fear Him above everything else you fear, if you ever learn to walk with Him, to serve Him, first, foremost in everything in your life, above your checkbook, above your social life, above your political life, if you’ll learn to put Him first and foremost, God’s made some promises to you. But if you don’t love Him with all your heart and you’re an earth dweller, not a heaven dweller, I’m telling you, you’re just going to wander in the spiritual wilderness. You’re just going around and around. It should have just taken a few days to get through that but it took years to teach them to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind. What did he say in Micah 6:8 that God requires? Something about justice? Yeah. Walk humbly? Yes. Wow. We’re on a pilgrimage.

I’ve been given a new station in Southern Baptist life. I’m elected to nothing. I serve on nothing. I’m not on any board. I’m not on anything. It’s really freeing. My friends at the North American Mission Board asked me if I would just be a representative when they ask me to go and when I can go to go and speak and

encourage people about local church evangelism. I said, "Yeah, I'll do that." Just so I can keep my own schedule and when I can, I can. When I can't, I can't.

I've got a couple of sermons I have to prepare. I can preach the same thing wherever I go. I always start with this. "I am in the first minute of the fourth quarter of my life as a gospel preacher." I'm 63. I'm not in the two-minute warning. My wife will tell me when it gets to two minutes. But I've lived three-quarters. I've learned some stuff. Have you ever had those half-time adjustments? Oh the Holy Ghost knows how to make those. Amen? Yeah. He'll say, "Let's come over here and talk a little while."

So I've been on this pilgrimage with many of you. I had a funeral the other day out at Bayview. I can't remember everybody that I've ever buried at Bayview but I remember one in particular, well two or three that are there in the Davis plot. It's Bob Davis who helped build this building and his wife, Betty, and Bob's momma are buried there. I made a picture. I said, "We dare not forget those that have gone before us, thousands, because we do at Olive today what thousands that have gone before us allow us to do now." One day we'll be out there, buried, dead, and gone to heaven. We're going to leave something but I'm not dead yet nor are you. We don't have a promise of tomorrow.

Brother Bowman sat in this service last Sunday, went home and had a stroke that night. We don't know but as long as we're on the pilgrimage and we're facing the battles and the barriers we've got to love Him with all our heart so that His promises can be ours, so that provision, that protection, it can be ours. So we walk the pilgrim's progress. Amen. And we're marching.

I told the Lord this morning, I said, "Lord, now what we ought to do is we ought to get everybody in here and we ought to march around the building today." That's what we ought to do. We ought to just get up and we ought to just all march and sing a song and I said, "Lord, I'm afraid to do that because I'm afraid the walls will fall down. There'll be somebody that'll really believe God and we'll be in trouble." I just want you to get that picture. We're going somewhere. We're not sitting still. You don't reach a plateau and just say, "Okay, that's enough." There's something else that God's got. There's another journey. There's another step.

You're a teenager and you're on the journey and then you go to college and you're on a journey and you find a mate and you're on the journey and you have children and you're on the journey and you marry your kids off and you're on a journey and the kids have kids and they're on a journey and they bring them home and then one day the kids and the children's children carry you out to Bayview and put you in a home and you finish your journey. Bless God, be faithful on the journey. God's faithful. We just need to learn to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind.