

‘His Story’ in our Future
Deuteronomy 30: 1-3, 11-20

One hundred and forty years ago the world in southwestern Ontario was a vastly different place. Small groupings of people gathered around natural transportation links like rivers or lakes and forged out a living which involved a lot of backbreaking labour and long and focused days.

This little town began because of the trees and it developed because of the rail line.

One hundred and forty years ago a small group of Christ’s disciples organized themselves under the leadership of a travelling elder into a local assembly called Forest Baptist Church. This morning we have seen and heard a brief overview of what has transpired in the years since under God’s direction of this fellowship of believers.

What is an anniversary? – well the dictionary says that ‘anniversary’ is ‘the yearly recurrence of the date of a past event’ and ‘the celebration or commemoration of such a date.’ All through the Scriptures we see that God has instructed His people to celebrate the ‘anniversaries’ of their pilgrimage with Him and He with them. Think of the many times stone cairns were set up – so that ‘you may tell your children what the Lord has done this day.’

Certainly, Passover was such a celebration – a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt which was the single biggest event in Old Testament history – of God saving His people from destruction.

We are told to come to the table of the Lord, not as a yearly anniversary celebration, but one far more often than that, to remember and celebrate what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us at the cross and is doing for us today and **‘as often as you do this you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.’**

So on this anniversary – the 140th of this congregation - we truly celebrate the faithfulness of Almighty God to us over these years.

Most good things have some pitfalls, and Satan likes to exploit them in our lives – so for a few moments this morning will you think with me of two things: **What we must avoid** and **what we must do**.

What we must avoid

I'm sure that there are multiple areas that we could consider – but the context of the scripture read this morning – the 29th chapter gives us two that we ought to ponder.

The first is pride. **Deut 29:19** 'one who when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart...'

It is so easy for great success to become pride as if the accomplishment were ours. The nature of humanity, according to Romans 1 is to worship the creation rather than the creator, and I believe by analogy we can easily see that we can gravitate to taking pride in 'success' rather than deflecting praise to the author of that 'success.'

There have been some great moments in these 140 years, a number of which have taken place in the collective experiences of those of us gathered in this sanctuary today. The challenge for each of us is to heartily, excitedly, passionately celebrate what has been good, and profitable and without explanation except for the grace and power of Almighty God our Heavenly Father without defaulting to the place of having puffed out chests and taking ownership as if it was our efforts and our works that have accomplished these things.

The second is complacency. Again **Deut 29:19** 'saying, I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.'

I checked out complacency in the Thesaurus – and it is directly related to two words - **conceit and comfort** – I found that an interesting connection.

The other danger that can easily creep in within a history of having virtually everything that we need [at least from our perspective] is that we become complacent and take it for granted. It is kind of a melding of being comfortable and being conceited at the same time.

So my point here is that we must avoid putting too much stock in our history as that which we can take credit for – as it is entirely by God's grace as He has used faithful men and women of faith to accomplish His will and we must avoid complacency which because we have a great facility, good programmes, sufficient financial resources and a fairly

peaceful place within our community we lose any sense of need for God's continuing gracious touch.

Moses warns the people about this. But then what does he tell them they must do?

What we must do.

Well – he says the answer is near you: **'But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart.'**

And – he says it isn't hard either: **'...so that you can do it.'**

So what is it? **'See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in His ways, and by Keeping His commandments and His statutes and His rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.'**

Deuteronomy 30:16 ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in His ways, and by keeping His commandments and His statutes and His rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

Here is what we must do: ***we must love the Lord our God, obey His voice and hold fast to Him.***

It's always been that way. While the promises of this passage to Israel have to do with the land, and health issues and financial fortunes which are not the direct promises to us – when we move this teaching forward into the New Covenant that has brought more light on God's purposes and salvation – and has shown it is not by attempted obedience to keep the law, but by the heart obedience that indicates that the Law has been written on our hearts which have been reborn by the precious work of Christ – when we look at what Moses said to the people of

Israel with the eyes of faith that we as New Covenant saints have been granted it is even more clear.

What we are to do – listen carefully – **is to choose life.**

And in choosing life, we are to **LOVE THE LORD, OBEY HIS VOICE and HOLD FAST TO HIM.**

The blessings of God which have to do with ‘**dwelling in the land that the Lord swore**’ – not in the sense of actual property to inhabit, but walking in His particular will and having His presence with us are directly related to our response of loving the Lord, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him.

Remember Jesus said that ‘**if you love Me you will keep my commandments.**’

- How can we know where we should go in the days to come?
- How can we know what the Lord wants us to do as we go forward into the next decade of service with and for Him?
- How can we be sure that His hand of blessing will be upon us and we will not become a blip on the annals of the town of Forest in the days to come?

Well we must take serious what Jesus has said: **John 14:18-23** ¹⁸“**I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**” ¹⁹**Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live.** ²⁰**In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.** ²¹**Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”** ²²**Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that You will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?”** ²³**Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.**

Friends, do we believe that God Himself has invested His Son’s life so that we might know Him both for time and eternity?

Do we believe that God has called each of us to Him personally to enter on a journey together while we live in this place that would bring honour to Him and accomplish His will?

Do we believe that what God began 140 years ago He will sustain if His people are truly His people, called by His name and humbling themselves before Him?

Then in what Moses said as he reviewed history and pointed to the Israelites future remains true for us today:

We must avoid falling into pride and seeing our heritage as more than something for which we should be grateful and giving thanks and praise to God

And

We must avoid becoming complacent thinking that all we need to do is coast along since we are secure in Him and as a result lose our genuine sense of desperate need of His presence in the presumption upon His grace with no responsibility on our part.

And

We must move forward by choosing life rather than death and choosing to love God, to obey His voice [which requires knowing His Word] and holding fast [holding tight] to Him.

This morning I do not have some really snappy 3 point plan to take our church forward – because there is no such a plan. I do not have some great ‘vision’ for the future crafted by myself and the elders.

What I have for you both individually and all of us collectively is to amplify what God has said in so many ways in His Word – that **when we seek after Him, being willing to do what He says, that His manifest presence will be with us.**

And that my dear friends, is what our community needs to see in order to come to grips with the gospel and the God of the gospel.

Today, let’s celebrate and let’s thank the God who has brought us thus far.

In 1712 in London, England Joseph Hart was born. He lived until May 24, 1768 and was buried in Bunhill Fields Cemetery, London England where John Bunyan, John Rippon & Isaac Watts lie nearby.

Joseph Hart resisted Christianity while he was young, writing the pamphlet *The Unreasonableness of Religion, Being Remarks and Animadversions on the Rev. John Wesley's Sermon on Romans 8:32*.

[Romans 8:32 ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?]

However, Hart came to Christ in 1757 at 45 years of age, serving Christ for 11 years before his death and becoming an enormously popular preacher and hymn writer. Tens of thousands attended his funeral.

For years now, it is his simple 2 verse hymn that we have sung at our anniversary time and at times of special blessing. Please stand and join with me in our traditional anniversary hymn:

How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful unchangeable Friend!
His love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end!

'Tis Jesus the First and the Last,
Whose Spirit shall Guide us safe home,
We'll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that's to come.