Intro.:

A. *Ryan had it made …*

At least that's what most of the other guys in his high school class thought. He was a very gifted athlete: taller than average, he was lean but strong … physically flexible with quick reflexes … and in the heat of a game, he had a keen ability to anticipate what was coming and not just react to what happened.

Ryan was a starter in all three seasonal sports he played in, and a good candidate to be the team captain next year. With the Christian values his parents had raised him, he considered this natural athletic ability to be an awesome gift of God … a blessing in fact. And so he pushed himself hard, wanting to make the most of it and striving for high performance. His coaches loved that combination of his raw skills and his coachability.

But as Ryan excelled more and more on the playing fields, his parents began to notice some changes in him. With more varsity playing time came a certain popularity and that "cool" factor. Ryan began to hang out with the jocks more, spending less time with his childhood best friend Jake, whose athletic skills were merely average.

What was more, while he was still friendly and had a good sense of humor, his Mom and Dad saw him becoming less teachable in other areas of life, like with his academics and in making faith-based choices in his life. His confidence as an athlete made him seem a bit arrogant in the classroom and in his church youth group.

While they supported him in his athletic success, their love for him led his parents to privately mention to Ryan their concerns about how he was changing. At first he was stung by their honesty, but later he had to admit some truth in their observations.

So it was not entirely clear whether this great athletic talent of Ryan's would be good for him in the long run, or not …

B. In the high visibility of the sports world, outstanding athletic abilities like Ryan's are clearly a great blessing, aren't they?

1. And yet Ryan also experienced them as a source of temptation … his abilities seduced him to rely less on God and to seek friends who were more popular than his old standby, Jake.

2. We all seek out God's blessings in our lives … but what if those blessings as we use them are not always good for us?

II. Can a blessing from God be a source of temptation at the same time?

A. If you reflect on it a while, this question isn't so unusual.

1. Not many things in life are 100% blessing, with no dangers or drawbacks.

2. Many things today can be <u>both</u> a gift of God <u>and</u> a source of temptation for us:

a) Sex can be a wonderful gift God gives us AND it can be a powerful source of temptation

b) Other things can also go both ways … if we have good looks and beauty … or a dynamic, charming personality … or if we possess excellent business skills

B. So … back to our Bible text today, what about the blessings that were sought out by God's people?

1. The children of Israel were in a major transition time … literally at a crossroads.

a) After 40 years of frustrating wilderness wanderings, they were finally poised to cross over the Jordan River into the land God had promised them

b) It's no wonder that they were seeking out blessings from God … This was a scary, unknown land they were entering!

c) Moses would not be allowed to enter the land with them, so the entire book of Deuteronomy was basically written as his farewell speech. You might call this book a supersized sermon … on steroids.

2. Deut. has sometimes been called "the Gospel according to Moses", because it keeps declaring the divine grace of God, all while calling God's people to radical faith and action. (Gerald E. Gerbrandt, <u>Deuteronomy</u>, Believers Church Bible Commentary, Herald Press, ©2015, p. 19)

a) "Today" is a very important word in Deuteronomy, calling the reader to action

b) In this book that word "today" appears dozens of times … far more than in any other book in the Bible (Gerbrandt, p. 21)

That key word "today" does appear twice here in ch. 8

We heard this chapter divided into 2 sections this morning – each section began with a reminder or a warning to be taken seriously "today" *(repeat 8:1a and 8:11b)*

3. Book of Deut. is constantly bringing God's message back to the present and asking us, "What are you going to do about this today?"

C. Perhaps we could summarize the message of Deuteronomy ch 8 this way: *"Be careful what you wish for!"*

1. Here we are on the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend…

a) we are hearing a passage in which God's people are reminded of what they have to be thankful for and what they have to look forward to

b) Deut. 8 gives a brief recital of God's loving deeds of provision and it names plenty of wonderful blessings which will await God's people in the Promised Land … <u>if</u> they are faithful to God's covenant.

c) After 40 years of nomadic life in a desert land … never getting to that great destination they kept hearing about … and beginning to speculate if this place was just some mythical paradise from Moses' imagination …

d) Is it any wonder that the Israelites were practically salivating over these promises … promises of abundant water, bumper crops, plenty of food, and at last some sense of prosperity?

2. But sometimes blessings are not all they're cracked up to be

a) With Christmas just around the corner, there are probably parents and grandparents here who can recall the latest and greatest technological sensation that your kids just HAD to have …

Maybe it was Atari 40 years ago, or a Nintendo game set more recently, or perhaps now it's wireless headphones or a tablet they can do almost anything on

with lots of begging beforehand and happy smiles on Christmas Day, a few months later there is much less conversation around the house with people glued to their screens, and you end up setting up restrictive usage rules for the sake of a reasonable family life

b) Sometimes great blessings carry within them the seeds of their own destruction, because good things, overused or done to excess, can take over our lives and change what we fundamentally value

3. So on this Thanksgiving Sunday when we seek God's blessings and we give God thanks for how we've been blessed … the typical Bible verse we hear would be Deut. 8:10 *(read)*

a) In our worship we've been praising the LORD our God for all God has given us, and this is right and good. I hope you also did that on Thursday!

b) But to use that common Deuteronomy word "today" … today I think God is also telling us, <u>"be careful what you wish for"</u>

III. "A time to be careful" –

A. That's how the NLT gives us the beginning of v. 11, which leads into the 2nd half of this chapter

1. This half of chapter is full of cautions and warnings that may make us squirm … in contrast to the feel-good sense of the 1st half

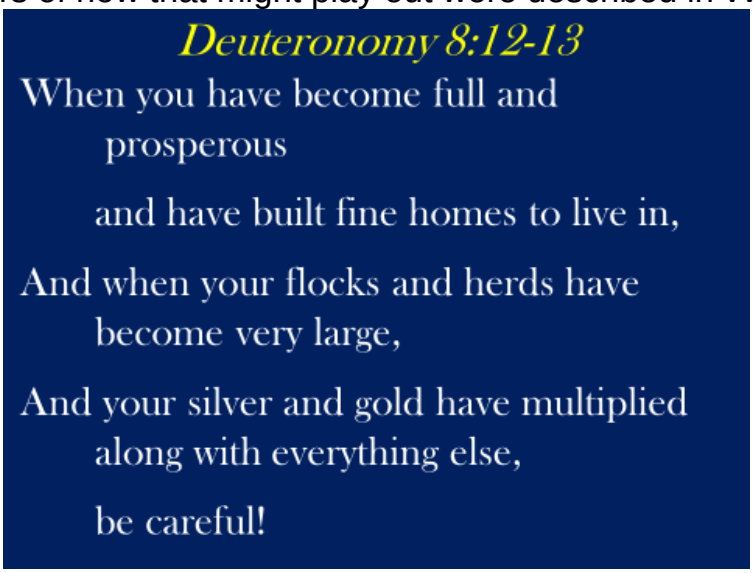
2. Why was it a time to be careful for the Israelites back then?

   a) Because God knew very well how the blessings they sought could then tempt them to turn away from the God who blessed them

   b) And today, my friends, God also knows that the blessings we enjoy can do the same thing to us

   c) It is still today … "a time to be careful"

3. The particulars of how that might play out were described in vv.



12-13 *(re-read)*
Hmm … does anything hit a little too close to home for you?

B. I was struck by how accurately, point by point, these verses could be describing the middle-class American church today …

1. We eat well and are satisfied, aren't we?

   a) Not just occasionally when the harvests are good, but we eat well 365 days a year compared to most of the world … We've gotten used to three squares a day, plus abundant snacks whenever we want

   b) In a world of supersized portions and all-you-can-eat buffet restaurants, on Thanksgiving, what we're eating is not truly a feast but rather just a bigger feast than we usually have all the other days!

2. We certainly have built finely appointed houses where we've

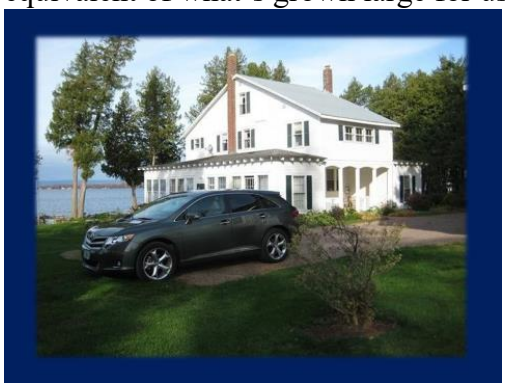
settled down for the long term

a) In our recent hospitality worship series, Pastor Cindy and I both preached how the NT reminds us we are strangers and aliens, because this world is not our home.

b) Yet a quick glance at all the accumulated luxurious stuff in most of our houses testifies how at home we have become in this world …

3. Now I recognize that in our world today, hardly anyone has herds and flocks that they compare to their neighbors'

a) But perhaps an inspection of the cars and RVs we drive would be the equivalent of what's grown large for us …



OR

b) Maybe it's the summer cottages we own and the vacations we take that would count as our "herds and flocks"?

4. Verse 13 even mentions the silver and gold that have increased

a) Few of us today actually hold our wealth in precious metals as the ancients did before the rise of banks …

b) But I think an examination of most of our bank accounts and investment portfolios would reveal how true this prophecy of Moses has become in terms of the biblical question, "Where does your true security lie?"

C. As a preacher, if I'm stepping on your toes …

1. Good, because I'm stepping on my own as well, which, like my dancing, makes me rather clumsy, but my aim is to not break anybody's toes …

2. Although this message today touches on a very common biblical subject (money and wealth), that is not my main focus

a) I am not here to categorically paint money as evil nor to denounce all wealth and those who have it

b) The Bible does not have a simplistic message on that … but the Bible does show over and over how wealth can be BOTH a tremendous blessing from God AND a huge source of temptation to become god in our lives

IV. What I was really drawn to are what I consider the key verses for today: 17 & 18 *(re-read)*

Deuteronomy 8:17-18a

He did all this so you would never say to yourself, 'I have achieved this wealth with my own strength and energy.' 18 Remember the LORD your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful …

A. We live in a society that has long glorified what used to be called "the self-made man"

1. From a young age, we are told to "take care of your own needs" … "pull your own weight" … and "don't be a burden on anyone else"

2. And if God is acknowledged at all in our world, relative to our material well-being, it may show up in that peculiar old saying, "God helps those who help themselves"

3. Our common attitudes toward ownership and the credit we take for what we have, often show up in advertising on radio, TV and internet.

a) When advertisers want to sell you something, they will often refer to this phrase "your hard-earned money". Listen for it sometime.

Advertisers will tell you what you deserve to get with that hard-earned money, because of course you earned it all.

But what if you don't deserve 100% of the credit for every penny you have?

b) What you WON'T ever hear is a commercial advising you how to spend the fortune that you were lucky enough to inherit from Grandpa

c) Likewise you won't hear an ad speaking to people of color, and congratulating them on the doubly hard work they did in order to succeed, despite not having white privilege to help them along the way.

d) And unless you're reading in some Christian publications, you're even less likely to find an ad telling you how worthy their product is for you to spend God's money that God blessed you with!

B. Deut. 8:17 &18 are powerful and prophetic words that I think most of us need to hear today in this country …

1. we whose ancestors benefitted from the Promised Land that was taken from Native Americans

2. Perhaps you wonder, "What does 'a time to be careful' mean?"

v. So I want to leave you with 2 takeaways:

A. 1st: <u>Stop assuming credit for what God has provided you</u>

1. As Christians our spending habits and how we talk about money every day tend to reveal how fiercely we believe it's "my money"

2. When it comes to natural resources around us, it's not hard for us Christians to give God credit for the beauty of nature.

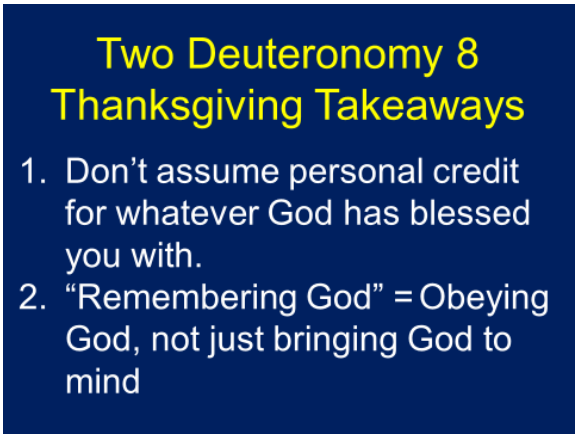
a) In fact, we may be quick to quote Ps. 24:1 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. (NLT)

b) But when it comes to thinking about money we've worked for, we're not so quick to remember the words of Deut. 8:18

c) When you get your paycheck, if your instinct is to say to yourself, "I earned this money, so it's mine to decide what to do with it" then Deut. 8:18 is meant for you.

3. When we're reminded of who it is that gives us the ability to make money, then we're less likely to feel entitled or self-righteous compared to other people who have less.

B. 2nd: "A time to be careful" is a call to action, not merely to thinking about God occasionally



1. We hear the words to "remember the LORD your God when you are comfortably settled in the Promised Land" and we think it's talking about nothing more than some private mental activity

   a) This morning I'm saying, "NO it's not enough to say to ourselves, 'Oh yes, God gave me this. Thank you, God!'"

   b) Throughout this chapter and the book of Deuteronomy, "remembering the LORD your God" is not a call to just think right, it's a call to do right

2. In verse 4 we see that the call to remember God is a call to obey God's commands … Then in v. 11 the warning to not forget God also means to not disobey his commands, regulations and decrees.

3. So the big challenge for us comfortable folks on Thanksgiving weekend is not whether we're gratefully remembering God as the source of our blessings … we do pretty well at that …

   a) The challenge is whether we're taking it the next step into obedience to what God asks of us

   b) As Xians living in the freedom of the Spirit, we do avoid legalistic devotion to obey every facet of OT law … yet we also note that Jesus himself told us that those who love Him will keep his commandments

4. Without giving you another legalistic checklist to mark, here are some of the biblical indicators that show we are "remembering God" by obeying God's commands

   a) We love one another in the church

   b) We love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us

   c) We extend hospitality even to "the least of these"

   d) We hide God's Word in our hearts, and pray without ceasing

   e) And not coincidentally for today, we generously give back to God the firstfruits of the income God has blessed us with

VI. Conclusion

A. Though the world around us has already moved on to Xmas, it's still appropriate today that we emphasize thanking God

1. Deut. 8 keeps telling us "Remember where these blessings come from" which means, "remember by obeying God

2. But after telling us what we should do, Deut. 8 also warns us, "Do not forget the LORD your God"

B. **As we move from Thanksgiving into Advent, I hear God saying to us,** *"My children, be careful what you wish for. Remember to thank me, but remember me also by obeying me."*

C. May it be so with us