Remember the Lord

Text: Deuteronomy 7-8

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**Scriptur**es: 1 Peter 2:9-12; Deuteronomy 7:6-9; 8

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 111, 436, 374, 276, 63, 318, 429, 530

Series: Deuteronomy (sermon #6)

Occasion: Lord’s Supper

Theme: Moses reminds the people of Israel that they are a chosen people, set apart by God to be holy and distinct from the nations around them, calling them to remember that they had been miraculously and powerfully delivered by the Lord from slavery in Egypt and led by Him through the wilderness in order to humble and test them and to prepare them for entry into the very good land which He had promised to them, the blessings of which would be theirs if they willingly obeyed His commands.

Proposition: Like Old Testament Israel, brothers and sisters, we too are a chosen race, a holy nation, having been delivered from slavery to sin, now journeying through a land which is not our eternal home, called to remember the saving work of Christ and to willingly obey Him as we look forward to the very good land which is our inheritance in Him.

**Introduction**

We all have memories. We have been designed by our Maker to store data about past events, experiences and facts which we have learnt in different parts (the hippocampus, the neocortex and the amygdala) of the incredibly complex organ we call the brain. We are indeed ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Ps 139:14) in God’s image.

However, as a result of the fall, our memory functions have become impaired – we forget things. Aging, traumatic events, stress, sickness or simply being distracted can all diminish our ability to remember even the most important information. When we don’t remember something, we forget it. Sometimes memory loss can be quite funny. Like when you go to another room in your house and then forget what you went there for! Or when you offered to make a cup of coffee for someone but then forgot to do so – until reminded!

Imagine though not making the cup of coffee that you had promised to your thirsty wife, husband or guest. Then when prompted you say something like: “*Oh, yes, I remembered that I had promised to make you a coffee, but then I just didn’t do it*”. Well, there’s not much point in remembering if you’re not going to act on what you’ve recollected!

This illustration points us to the meaning of a key word in Deuteronomy chapters 7 and 8: ‘remember’. To remember here is to ‘bring something to mind with a view to action’. In the case of a cup of coffee, remembering to make it is bringing it to mind and then actually going ahead and making it!

In the Bible, God remembers; for example: Before He delivered His people from Egypt, ‘*God remembered his covenant with Abraham*’ (Ex 2:24). When Mary was pregnant with the baby Jesus, she praised the Lord God her Saviour saying “*He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy*” (Luke 1:54). When God remembers, it is not that He has somehow forgotten, rather that He brings it to mind in order to act.

In the last sermon which Moses preached to the Israelites, gathered on the border of the promised land which they were about to enter, he reminds the people to remember and not to forget. We’re going to focus on his address to Old Testament Israel as recorded in Deuteronomy chapters 7 and 8 under three points:

1. The Lord has chosen you, His holy people
2. The Lord has delivered you miraculously
3. The Lord is leading you to a very good land
4. **The Lord has chosen you, His holy people**

One of my childhood memories from my high school years is during the sports period when we played football. Then we would stand in a line for selection alternately; first by the captain of one team and then by the captain of the other team. Inevitably the skilled, the strong, those with good co-ordination, and the most popular were chosen first by the team leaders. My recollection is of being amongst the last to be chosen. I was smaller than most, had poor ball skills and bad eyesight. Unappealing football players don’t generally get selected.

This is so very different from the Lord’s election of His people. The truth that God choses a special people for Himself is consistently revealed throughout Scripture (e.g. Deut 14:2; Is 41:8; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 2:9). His choosing is entirely based on His own will, not on any qualities in those He selects. When God revealed Himself to Moses, He said “*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy*” (Ex 33:19).

In His sermon Moses reminds Israel that they are the people to whom the Lord has been gracious in His great mercy, saying "*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has* ***chosen you*** *to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth*” (Deut 7:6).

Like those strong, skilled, popular soccer plays at my school, you might think that the Israelites were especially attractive to the Lord. Not so! The Lord, through His servant Moses, explains: “*It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt*” (Deut 7:7-8).

Moses is reminding Israel that the Lord has set His love on them as a people group for no other reason than that He set His love on them because He chose to do so, despite their small size. Israel was a people ‘holy to the Lord’. They were set apart from the other nations because they had been uniquely chosen. Their separation was to be evidenced by:

1. Israel not entering into covenant agreements with other nations (7:2)
2. The Israelites not inter-marrying with people from the nations. (Such marriages were often connected to the formation of political treaties).
3. The removal of the objects of worship used by the nations– altars, pillars and carved images. They were to discard the silver and gold which was used for these idol – ‘lest you be ensnared’ (v25).
4. The complete removal of the people groups (Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites {7:1-2}) who inhabited the promised land into which Israel was about to enter.

In this unique historical event, Israel was to act as God’s instrument of judgement against the nations whilst also removing the temptation for themselves to worship the pagan gods. These nations were to be devoted to ‘complete destruction’ as Israel progressively occupied the Promised Land (7:2). Completely removing all people from the whole land at one time so that they could not adequately occupy it themselves was to be avoided lest ‘*the wild beasts grow too numerous for you*’ (7:22).

We are in a very different situation to Old Testament Israel. However, like them brothers and sisters, God calls us a “*chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession*” (1 Pet 2:9). We are prone to forget that we have been chosen by God to be brought out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet 2:9). It is because of Christ’s victory at the cross that we are declared to be holy by God and called to live as ‘sojourners and exiles’ in this world, abstaining from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against our souls (1 Pet 2:11).

For us this is a gradual, ongoing spiritual battle, as was the physical conquest of Canaan. Like Old Testament Israel not fully obeying the Lord’s command to remove the nations, we are prone to leave destructive desires and harmful habits alive in our hearts when the Lord calls us to put them to death (Col 3:5). All faithful Christians struggle with this ongoing work of conquest, just as the Apostle Paul did (Rom 7:14). To help us in this spiritual conflict (Eph 6:12), the Lord calls us to remember His work of grace in bringing us this far. This brings us to the second point:

1. **The Lord has delivered you miraculously**

We most easily remember the very big events of our lives, both individually and as a community. For example, many here will vividly recall where they were when the big earthquakes struck in this city on 4th September 2010 and on 22nd February 2011.

In the spiritual realm, some of us may have experienced a particular, spectacular time when we became aware of our salvation in Christ. In God’s providence some people, like the Apostle Paul have a dramatic ‘conversion experience’ but many do not. Their awareness of God having put His love on them comes gradually. I think that this is the experience of many here today.

It’s worth thinking about that God does not instruct us to recall our personal experience of His deliverance. However, He does call us to remember what He has done to save us. This is what He said to Israel through His servant Moses: “*Remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt*” (7:18) Remember (!) that ‘remembering’ here is ‘bringing something to mind with a view to action’. The ‘action’ here is so that they would not be afraid of their enemies (7:18). Brother and sisters, Christ calls us to remember, not our experience of salvation, but His death which has freed us from the penalties of sin.

**Just as** Old Testament Israel was delivered from Egypt miraculously with ‘signs, wonders, God’s mighty hand and outstretched arm’ (Deut 7:18), **so we** who are in Christ have been delivered miraculously by the great sign and wonder of Christ’s death as he willingly substituted Himself as a ‘ransom for many’ (Matt 20:28) and was then raised from the dead.

As we remember Christ’s work with the sacrament of Lord’s Supper, one of the ‘actions’ of our remembrance of His death (Luke 22:19) is not to be afraid of other people, or of our own death (e.g. Luke 12:4) because nothing and nobody can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:39). Christian, remember this as you partake or observe the celebration of Lord’s Supper today so that you may be ‘*nourished and refreshed to eternal life*’ (Lord’s Supper Form 1).

Through Moses, the Lord also calls Israel to ‘*remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you*’ (8:2). The wilderness through which the Lord had guided His people for 40 years was a tough environment where the lack of rainfall meant that both water and food was extremely scarce. There was a divine purpose in God’s leading of His people through such a severe situation. It was ‘*that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not*’ (8:2). He was disciplining His people as a good father does the son He loves (8:5; Heb 12:9). He was training them to willingly obey His trustworthy Word. God’s miraculous provision of manna in the desert was designed to teach His people a fundamental principle of dependence upon Him: That ‘*man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*’ (8:3). It was the very Word of God that contained within it His gracious provision for the needs of his people.

When Jesus was tempted to be self-sufficient by Satan by performing a similar miracle for his own benefit in the wilderness, he quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 and demonstrated His trust and complete dependence on God the Father, knowing that He would be sustained by Him. After resisting this temptation *‘angels came and ministered to him*’ (Matt 4:11). Having trusted in His Heavenly Father, Jesus was provided for and sustained so that He could complete His mission.

It was critical that Israel remembered the powerful work of the Lord in delivering them so that they would act by depending fully upon the life-giving Word of the Lord. So important was this that God gave them the annual feast of Passover as an aid to their memory (Exo 12; Deut 16:3) which pointed forward to Christ. Jesus Himself is our Passover Lamb who has been sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7). In remembering Him and proclaiming His death we do not fear our ‘sworn’ enemies, the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh (from HCLD52). In celebrating and witnessing Lord’s Supper we are reminded that we live in dependence on the life-giving Word of God and that the Lord is leading us, sometimes through severe situations in order to humble, test and train us. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16), that is for everyone who is heading for an eternal home. Which brings us to our third point:

1. **The Lord is leading you to a very good land**

When we think of remembering, we usually have in mind past events, but we can also remember something which we look to for the future. It’s possible to be so distracted that you forget where you are heading. Remembering your destination is essential for keeping on track.

For Old Testament Israel their destination was a paradise so different to the desert, which for most of them who were listening to Moses’ sermon was the only home they had ever known. This good land was a paradise of abundant water, food and mineral resources. This would be a place of plenty in which the Lord would provide: prosperity and fruitfulness (7:13-14), good health (7:15) and military success in conquest (7:16). It would be critical to their continued flourishing and well-being that the people remembered that it is the Lord God who gives them the power to prosper (8:17). If instead of remembering, they forgot and as a consequence worshipped false gods, then they would ‘surely perish’ (8:18-19).

What was true back then is just as true today. The blessings of God, which are good in themselves, bring with them the temptation to think that these good things are the result of human effort and ability. So often prosperity leads to pride which then leads to forgetting the Lord. Read on through the Bible from the book of Deuteronomy and you’ll see how devastating forgetting the love of their Lord, as evidenced by their disobedience to His Word, was for Israel. At a human level it is pride which prevents a person from remembering that the Lord is their Creator and stops them from honouring God (Rom 1:21)

Moses was likely preaching to a mixed congregation of Israel when the words of Deuteronomy 7 and 8 were first spoken. Some trusted the Lord God in their hearts and believed His promises and desired to hear and obey His Word, others maybe not. Today, as you hear this sermon, many listening have saving faith in Christ, perhaps there are some, or even one, who does not. If this describes your condition today, come to Christ today and trust in Him to deliver you from death to life. “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him*” (John 3:36).

For us, brother and sisters, it is critical for our spiritual flourishing and well-being that we remember that the goodness of the Lord to be experienced both in this life and in the life to come. In this life, the blessings which are available to us as we willingly obey the Lord’s good word, include:

* Power - to ‘live your best life’ in Christ, to glorify Him and to be transformed to be more and more like the perfect human being in your character.
* Wisdom – to know how to live this life well. Such wisdom is readily available when we ask God in prayer (James 1:5).
* Peace – with God (Rom 5:1), with other people (Eph 2:14-18) and within yourself (Phil 4:7).
* Freedom – from fear (Heb 13:6) and anxiety (Phil 4:6) when we prayerfully trust in our Lord.

In the life to come, the blessings which await us in the ‘very good land’ of the New Heavens and New Earth include:

1. physical prosperity and flourishing lived in perfect resurrection bodies in a home of wholesome abundance, and
2. spiritual prosperity and flourishing lived in the presence of the Lord God Almighty and Christ the Lamb whose perfect obedience and sacrificial death enable these covenant blessings to be ours if we will believe in Him.

In conclusion, some of us have better memories than others. We are all prone to forgetfulness as we get older, suffer from sickness or stress, or when we are distracted. Each time we meet here to worship the Lord on the first day of the week we are reminded of the resurrection of Christ and of the gospel call to come to Him in repentance and faith. When we celebrate Lord’s Supper, we especially remember Him and proclaim his death until He comes again (1 Cor 11:26).

In light of our text from Deuteronomy 7-8, Brothers and sisters, remember the Lord so that:

1. You are not afraid of other people who would unjustly harm you
2. You are not afraid of death
3. You live by God’s Word, being willing to be humbled and tested as you are trained by your Heavenly Father to be fully dependent upon Him.
4. You flourish spiritually in this life
5. You keep your focus on the very good land which the Lord has prepared for you. A home where you will prosper forever in the presence of the One who died in your place for you and has lived on this earth faithfully by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.

AMEN