

"You Shall Remember The Lord Your God"

When I first went to work on this passage for today's sermon, I had just discovered that I had missed an important social engagement. I had reminded myself for several days, but when the morning came, I basically had forgot about it and missed it on my calendar. Then I discovered my mistake just a little bit too late. I felt horrible for letting someone down to say the least. It's not like me to miss an appointment, and you just feel awful when something like that happens. But of course, there's not much you can do at that point except find a way to really communicate how sorry you are and find ways to not let that happen again. Well I realized I had forgotten this appointment, just before I started to read over this passage. And well, as you probably noticed, this passage is a passage that emphasizes not forgetting certain things but instead to remember! Needless to say, I felt all the more convicted about my mistake.

And yet, in this passage, the emphasis is not on remembering social engagements. It's actually much more than that. And so if I felt bad about forgetting an important appointment, how much more serious and important is the subject matter in this passage? Here you have Israel being warned by God through Moses. Moses is basically telling them how important it is to remember what God had taught them up to this point. They must not forget this. But this passage talks about remembering and not forgetting in two very different contexts. The first was set in the wilderness wandering, the other would be in the Promised Land. These two settings would be very different. One was a place where they had little. One would be a place where they would had plenty. But God was teaching them a similar lesson in both situations. And it would be this God-given lesson which they had learned in their previous wilderness wandering that they'd need to remember when they would enter into the Promised Land.

Essentially both the wilderness wandering and the Promised Land were different situations where God was testing and teaching Israel. He's teaching them and training them as a father trains a son. That's what verse 5 says. And so that's what we'll look at now. We'll look first at Israel's test in the wilderness. Then we'll look at Israel's test in the Promised Land. Finally, we'll think about how this all relates to God's call to remember and not forget. And as we study what Israel was supposed to learn and not forget, we'll see what God would have for us to learn today and remember as well.

And so let's begin by thinking about Israel's testing in the wilderness. Verse 2 describes their wilderness experience as a test. It says that God used that experience to humble them and test them. Just look at how the wilderness is described in verse 15. It says it was a terrible wilderness. There were fiery serpents and scorpions. A "fiery" serpent probably refers to them being poisonous. It was a thirsty land - no water in other words. They didn't have any food even to eat at first. In other words, the wilderness was basically a barren desert. They didn't have any good thing in the desert. It was a time where they were lacking in so many things. God says here that this was humbling for Israel. They were empty physically. And God said that he used these things to test Israel.

I mean at look at how this is expressed in verse 3. It says that God allowed them to go hungry. Just stop and think about that. God actually allowed them to go hungry. Surely this applies to all the other things in verse 15. If God allowed them to go hungry, it means he also allowed them to go thirsty. To experience the snakes and scorpions. To go through the terrible wilderness experience. He allowed them to experience lack; to be short of the things they needed. And that's what they experienced.

Think about the temptation in that sort of context. If you are in a situation where you find yourself lacking of certain basic things, what might you be tempted to do? Well, you might first despair, and then after that you might start to grumble and complain. Well, of course, just read the book of Numbers. That pretty much describes what Israel did. Israel repeatedly fell in despair and then grumbled and complained against God. They blamed God for all their heartaches. And they didn't just theologically attribute these things to God's providence in some fatalistic way. No, they accused God of evil. Of bringing them out to a bad place to destroy them. They accused God of malicious intent, of hating them. Have your kids every claimed that you hate them? Well, that's what Israel did time and again with God.

But of course, God didn't let them starve. He didn't let them thirst to death. God did provide. He provided manna from heaven according to verse 3. It says they didn't know what the stuff was. Why? Because it wasn't from this world. It was bread from heaven! And God gave them water from a rock, verse 15. He provided for them in their clothing and physical strength as well -- according to verse 4, their clothes didn't wear out and their feet didn't swell. Some of our feet swell just making a trip around the house! And I can't get more than a few years out of expensive high-tech hiking boots; let alone wandering in the wilderness for forty years! Well the point of this is clear. Each of these things was a miracle. God miraculously fed them, he miraculously took care of them physically, he miraculously protected their clothing. These things were God's miracles to provide for them during this humble time of their wilderness wandering.

So what was Israel supposed to learn in this testing in the wilderness? Well, certainly one thing is pretty clearly. That God will provide. He'll provide for all our needs. Instead of being tempted to grumble and complain against God when we find ourselves in humble circumstances, we can *trust* God. That he's got a good plan for our lives. That he knows what we need and he'll provide in due time. We can cry out to God in a prayer of trust and petition, instead of in accusation and blame.

And yet, though that lesson is true, there was actually a more specific thing God was teaching them according to this passage. Just look at verse 3 again. Moses tells us what the people were supposed to learn here. When God allowed them to go hungry and then gave them bread from heaven, there was this lesson to learn. Verse 3, "That He [God] might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD." The only reason they had bread and water in that wilderness was because of God's Word that supernaturally provided. But this was teaching a more deeper truth than just that God will provide for our physical needs. God was showing them that they needed more than just provision for their physical needs. They needed God. And they needed God's Word. God and his Word was to be their real source of sustenance. In last chapter we saw how God viewed Israel as his treasured possession. Well, here we see that the people should have seen God and God's Word as their treasure. They needed to delight themselves in the LORD. God was to be their source of life

and sustenance. And so this was the lesson they were supposed to really learn. In all their trials in the wilderness, when they were tempted to think that they didn't have enough, they should have realized something. That they really had all that they needed. Because they had God. God was with them. God was their God. There was nothing more that they really needed. This is what they should have learned, and that's what they must remember and not forget.

Well, let's turn now to think about Israel's testing in the Promised Land. At this point, their testing in the wilderness lay behind them. But God is describing now through Moses of a future trial for them. This is one that on the surface would seem like a very different test for them, but fundamentally it was actually the same. Here's the nature of the test. When they come into the Promised Land, God will put them in a place to experience plenty. They will be full in terms of material possessions. They will not lack.

Just look at the description of the Promised Land in verses 7-10. Some scholars have suggested that these verses were a song incorporated into the chapter here to describe how wonderful the Promised Land is. It's a good land. Full of natural resources. Lots of room for agriculture. Everything you'd want in the ancient Near East. The result is in verse 10. They'd eat and be full. And in verse 17. They'd gain lots of wealth. They'd be fully satisfied, physically content, and rich in the world's eyes. That's life in the Promised Land. A lot different than life in the terrible wilderness, huh?

So what temptation might there be for Israel, once they experience this time of plenty in the Promised Land? Well, it's a temptation of pride. That's what verse 17 warns them about. God's telling them right here that when they enter the Promised Land and receive all these good things, the danger is that they are going to give themselves the credit. That's what God foresees in verse 17. That they might say in their heart, "My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth."

But verse 18 challenges that interpretation. It says that's untrue! Verse 18 gives God the credit. Verse 18 says God is one who gave them the power to get this wealth. This is one of the hard parts about success, isn't it? When things go bad in our life, we usually look to blame others, including God. But when things go right, we tend to give ourselves the credit and forget to acknowledge God. You see, God can bless us in many different ways. Often those blessings can come in spite of what we do. When that happens, it's a lot easier to recognize God's hand and to thank him. But when the blessings comes as a direct result of something we did, the temptation can be to forget God. We can think that we did it all by ourself. But we forget that God often works through second causes. That means that God often chooses to bless us through our own good actions. But just think through that. Just because you do something that could result in a good payoff, doesn't guarantee that it will. I'm sure we've all worked hard on something in our life, only to see it not come to fruition. But when it does payoff; when we do find success; when we find ourselves having plenty as the result of our works; it doesn't mean that it was all about us. It's not like God didn't have anything to do with it. No, it was God who blessed you to be able to have such success through your labors.

But notice specifically what God is telling them here. He's not only telling them that he is one to get the credit when they succeed in the Promised Land. There's more to this lesson for them than just this. You see, God's

connecting the lesson they learned in the wilderness with the lesson they would learn in the Promised Land. The lessons are connected. That's why verses 14-16 interrupt talking about their temptation to pride in the Promised Land with a recollection of their time in the wilderness. Moses interrupts the Promised Land context. He pauses and remembers back to what they learned in the wilderness. What they learned in the wilderness ought to safeguard them from this temptation in the Promised Land.

But what could their time of lacking in the wilderness have to say about their time of plenty in the Promised Land? Well, what was the lesson they learned in the wilderness? They learned that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. That's what they learned in the wilderness. And it's that lesson that they must not forget, but must remember once they are in the Promised Land and experiencing plenty.

You see, this is a lesson for us both in times of plenty and in times of want. "Whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want," this is a lesson we need to remember. When Israel seemed to have everything in the Promised Land, one fundamental thing hadn't changed from their time in the wilderness. They still needed God. Whether we have much or little, if we have God, then we really have all that we need. And if we have little otherwise, but we have God, it is enough. If we have everything otherwise, but do not have God, then we really have nothing. Rather, it is God who gives us strength in all our circumstance. He gives us strength in those times of hunger to keep going. He gives us strength in times of abundance to see our continued need for him. This is the lesson Israel needed to keep remembering, whether they were in the Promised Land or the wilderness. It is the lesson we all need to have constantly before us as well.

You see, this passage has a call to remember and not forget. Remember and not forget. It's littered throughout this passage. There's the call to remember in verses 2 and 18. There's a call not to forget in verses 11, 14, and 19. Israel was told not to forget God and their need for him and his Word in their life. Both tests had this same message. Their testing in the wilderness was a call to remember and not forget their God in their hard times. The testing they experienced in the Promised Land was again a call to remember and not forget their God in the good times.

Just contrast these two things. Forgetting versus remembering. Look at what forgetting would result in. Verse 11 says that forgetting God would result in them not keeping God's commandments. In their wilderness wandering, forgetting who God is and what he had already done for them, would result in them grumbling and complaining against God. In the plenty of the Promised Land, verse 17 says that forgetting would involve presumption and pride. They'd pridefully presume that they accomplished their success without God. The end result of forgetting is told to us in verses 19-20. Destruction. To ultimately forget your God is essentially apostasy. It's to deny God as God. And the end result would become the same as the pagan nations around Israel: forgetting God would result in their destruction.

But the opposite would be to remember God. And look how that's described here. Verse 6 describes remembering God as walking in God's ways, fearing him, and keeping his commandments. Verse 10 says that remembering God would result in them blessing God. This would be of course in recognizing how God had blessed them. When the people remembered God, it would mean that they

recognize all God had done for them and continues to do for them. That sort of remembrance should break forth in praise for God.

And ultimately this sort of remembrance of God was for their own good. It wasn't just to honor God through praise and obedience. But God knew that it was actually in their best interest. Verse 16 says that God was testing the people like this for their own good. His testing their remembrance of Him was to grow them as his people. They were growing up from childhood to adulthood. God was rearing them as his children, teaching them how they needed him. That's the most important lesson they could learn. They needed God. They needed his Word. They needed his grace. And in all this God had good in store for them. That's why he took care of them even during their time of humility in the wilderness. It's why in verse 18 he gave them power in the Promised Land to gain wealth. It's also why in verse 18 that he was doing this in order to confirm his covenant with them. In all this, God was at work for their own good. Remembering God ultimately results in life.

Of course, I hope you recognize by now that the sort of remembering and forgetting that God's talking about here is not about absentmindedness or just a state of mind. We can forget God, even while we technically remember still who he is and what he's done for us. Any time we make our life about something other than him, any time we have setup an idol in our heart over God, then we have forgot God. No, what we need to remember is that God is our everything. He is our source of life and contentment in all things.

Jesus didn't forget this. He remembered his heavenly father in all things. And we see this in his own testing. Don't forget that Jesus had a wilderness testing. At the start of his earthly ministry, he was out in the wilderness fasting and praying for forty days. And guess what? Luke 4:2 says that he got hungry! God allowed Jesus to be hungry. This was part of *his* testing. And at that point, Satan came to tempt Jesus, to use his power to command the stones to become bread. But Jesus answered Satan by quoting verse 3 from this passage. Luke 4:4, Jesus said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" Jesus remembered the lesson. He remembered his God. That there was more to life than earthly things. And in that time of wilderness testing and temptation, he did what we had not. He held fast to God when he was lacking in earthly things. He remembered God through obedience and in prayer. And this was not just as a good example for us. No, this was in the place of us. He accomplished in that wilderness temptation what we have not been able to accomplish. Perfect righteousness. He showed himself righteous. And when we as Christians now come to him in faith, his righteousness is accounted to us. Righteousness by faith. A righteousness not of ourselves, but of Christ. And it's a gift of God to us.

Let me say this abundantly clear. We have not remembered God as we ought. We've forgot him and his Word in different ways. We deserve destruction and damnation for the ways we've forgotten God. Even our best remembering of God at times has fallen short. But if we are in Christ; if we believe in Christ, then his remembrance is our remembrance. He overcame in that wilderness to show forth that as our redeemer he held fast to God. He did that in our place.

Brothers and sisters, let us then remember Christ. Let us not forget what Christ has done for us. Let us instead realize that what we really need in life is God. And we can have God and we can know God, only through Christ. And so this passage calls us to remember God by remembering Christ. And it's

through this, that we ourselves find our strength to overcome all our own tests and trials.

This is what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4. He said, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Paul learned the lesson. I can't help but think of this chapter from Deuteronomy as the background for Paul's words here. Israel experienced a life of both plenty and want in the wilderness and then in the Promised Land. But they were called to remember their God in both situations. They didn't do a very good job of that. And so the true Israel came down to earth to do it for them, and for us.

I mean think about this. If we are saying we need to remember Christ in all things, we are acknowledging that we need Christ. That he's the source of our life. And what a fitting analogy this is in light of our passage today. That Christ is the bread of life that comes down out of heaven. When Israel hungered in the wilderness, they still needed God. Manna didn't do it for them. Well God came down to them and us in Jesus. When Israel had earthly treasure in the Promised Land, they still needed God. Earthly treasures are temporary. You can't take pomegranates and figs with you when you die, nor copper or iron. We need God to be our great reward. God has given us this reward to them and us in Jesus. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you. And so *this* is why Paul can say that he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. Whether he had a lot or a little, Paul recognized that all he *really* needed was Christ. This is the same for us.

Let us not forget our need for Christ. Let us constantly remember Christ. We need Christ. We need his strength in temptation. We need him as our real source of nourishment. We need him as our real source of wealth and riches. He is the one who simultaneously humbles us and lifts us up. He's the one who is with us in all life's trials, growing us and teaching us. We need Christ.

What dangers of forgetting God do you have? When you first become a Christian, maybe it's hard to imagine. But in the week in and week out as a Christian, as the years go by, we need to hold steadfast to Christ. When we find ourselves in troubles, lacking in some way, sparse, even in our worldly possessions, we can forget that it's God who sustains us. We can want to do whatever it takes to solve our current problems, even if that doesn't involved obedience, faith, or trust. Or in the other extreme, when we find ourselves serving well, growing, actively living out the Christian life, we can become presumptuous that's it all about us. "Look how good of a Christian I've been." Well, that is not the right attitude. That was the attitude of the Pharisees. No, both Moses and Paul agree here. They remind us that the solution is to remember Christ. Remember all that God has done for us in Christ. Remember that we need him in every place in our life. Remember that when you do succeed as a Christian, even in your godly living, it is God who has given you the power to live like this. In all things, remember God and give him the glory. He will not disappoint you.

Today as we come to the Lord's table, we do this as Christ instructed, "In remembrance of me." Saints, as we come to the Lord's table today, I hope you realize the significance. It's a God given way to keep us remembering and never forgetting. It's God's way to visibly reminds us of this truth.

Christ is the bread that comes down out of heaven. We need him and what he gives us. As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we proclaim this until he comes. Let's keep remembering Christ each time we take of the Supper, and in all that we do, by the power of his grace. Amen.

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