

You Will Forget

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Preacher: Andrew Moody

[0 : 0 0] this is the evening service at holy trinity on the sixteenth of september two thousand and one the preacher is andrew moody his sermon is entitled you will forget and is based on deuteronomy chapter eight verses one to twenty so enormous and so shocking that it makes the ears of everyone who hears it tingle our ears have been tingling all week haven't they we've been transfixed by the images stunned that such a terrible catastrophe could happen a tragedy could come so suddenly and so unexpectedly that so many ordinary people could be going about their daily lives living ordinary lives working making phone calls to their families shopping doing all the things that ordinary people do in western society and the next minute be either dead or fleeing for their lives i don't know about you but i've been distracted by it all week i can't look away i i want to stay in front of the tv all day long to find out what happens next i don't actually care about the anset collapse i want to know what's happening over in america there's this feeling that this event has such enormous importance that the history of the world is on a pivot that it's about to change that this is what history right now is all about that there's never been such a tragedy and never will be again that this this happening before us this disaster is of such enormous importance that nothing else can compare but tonight as we look at deuteronomy 8 we are brought back to reality because here we see that terrorism and mass destruction are not the worst things that can happen to people who live in prosperity and in comfort there's a far greater tragedy and a greater disaster a disaster with eternal consequences a disaster that comes on people because they live in comfort and prosperity a disaster that targets god's people and brings them down a disaster that could be in progress in some of our lives already tonight and that will almost certainly claim a few of us here tonight before our days are done the disaster i'm speaking about and that deuteronomy speaks about is the disaster of falling away of forgetting about god of living lives that ignore god and shut god out let me ask you whether you if you're a christian ever worry about falling away or wonder whether you will stay a christian do you ever ask yourself whether you'll still be a christian in 10 years or 20 years or 50 years time how confident are you that your faith will last the distance of course on one level some of us might object that the idea of falling away is impossible that since it's god who gives us faith and predestines us to be his people that he'll keep us faithful to him through our lives and get us through to the end and of course from the perspective of eternity that must be right we'll look back when we get to heaven and realize that it was all god's work that he did it all and we'll thank him and praise him for his mercy but in the meantime from the perspective of this life and this time things aren't quite so cut and dried the bible is insistent that there are some of us who receive god's word gladly and joyfully

and look like christians and think of ourselves as christians and think we have a real faith in jesus but then like seeds scattered on shallow ground and amongst thorns slowly give it up or chuck it in completely the apostle paul warns us in 1 corinthians 10 verse 12 that if we think we are standing firm in our faith we should take care that we don't fall so that we don't come to ruin maybe you know some people to whom that's happened a few years ago when i was working out a list of people to pray for i made a list of all the people i knew who had once seemed keen christians and who chucked it in that list came to about 13 people and i know that if i made that list again today that there would be many more people on that list so i wonder if you ever worry or wonder about falling away giving up your faith if you do then deuteronomy is a passage that's written for you because deuteronomy 8 is addressed to a group of god's people who are about to move into a situation of great danger to their faith they're about to be threatened by real disaster real shipwreck they've done the exodus these people they've come out of egypt and slavery they've spent 40 years wandering around the desert following moose and eating manna and now as they prepare to enter the promised land the land of canaan the land of milk and honey there's a great danger that lies ahead for them they have to be warned about now paul's going to read deuteronomy 8 to us and as he reads it i want you to see if you can work out what that danger is deuteronomy 8 is written on the sheet that was handed to you or in the bible's on page 145 this entire commandment that i command you today you must diligently observe so that you may live and increase and go in and occupy the land that the lord promised on oath to your ancestors remember the long way that the lord your god has led you these 40 years in the wilderness in order to humble you testing you to know what was in your heart whether or not you would keep his commandments he humbled you by letting you hunger then by feeding you with manna with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the lord the clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these 40 years know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the lord your god disciplines you therefore keep the commandments of the lord your god by walking in his ways and by fearing him for the lord your god is bringing you into a good land a land with flowing streams with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills a land of wheat and barley of vines and fig trees and pomegranates a land of olive trees and honey a land where you may eat bread without scarcity where you will lack nothing a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper you shall eat your fill and bless the lord your god for the good land that he has given you take care that you do not forget the lord your god by failing to keep his commandments his ordinances and his statutes which i am commanding you today when you've eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them and when your herds and flocks have multiplied and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied then do not exalt yourself

forgetting the lord your god who brought you out of the land of egypt out of the house of slavery who led you through the great and terrible wilderness an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions he made water flow for you from flint rock and fed you in the wilderness with manner that your ancestors did not know to humble you and to test you and in the end to do you good do not say to yourself my power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth but remember the lord your god for it is he who gives you power to get wealth so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors as he is doing today if you do forget the lord your god and follow other gods to serve and worship them i solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish like the nations that the lord is destroying before you so shall you perish because you would not obey the voice of the lord your god well i wonder if you identified the nature of the threat that faces the israelites the hebrews as they are about to go into the promised land the threat and the danger is that they are about to become rich and prosperous as soon as moses finishes his speech he is going to go off and die and joshua his off-sider is going to lead the people into the land of canaan where life is going to be comfortable and work will be rewarding and satisfying and they will have plenty to eat and they are going to live good lives and full lives and happy lives and then they are going to forget about god because they are so distracted by all the great things that god is giving them just like some of us here as we get richer or graduate and get good jobs or move up the corporate ladder or buy a house or have families as we enjoy the good things that god gives us some of us may forget about god as well which is why deuteronomy 8 is such a valuable passage for us today because it describes people about to face the same kind of pressures and temptations that we in a rich society face as well because of this future context that deuteronomy 8 has

I don't mind too much if you feel that it doesn't apply to you tonight some of you may feel my life is miserable and has no prospects of getting good I'm having a rotten time I'm not tempted by prosperity or comfort well if you actually really do have no prospects of comfort or prosperity in this world in this life then you can go and read another passage of the bible because it doesn't apply to you but for most of us sooner or later we will enjoy the good things in this life sooner or later busyness and pressures and enjoyments in our society will come that life in western society in rich society will apply its pressures and its temptations to us and if it does happen in the future and if you pay attention to deuteronomy 8 then you'll be ready for it and you won't lose your faith and be destroyed like many of the Israelites were as God warned them they would be so let's get into it if drifting away from God is the great danger the great disaster then what are God's remedies for this disaster and this tragedy well the first thing that Moses tells them to do the Israelites to do is obey God's commandments in verse 1 he tells them this entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe so that you may live and increase and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors in verses 11 to 14 he warns them take care that you do not forget the Lord your God by failing to keep his commandments his ordinances his statutes which I commanded you today which I'm commanding you today when you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them and when your herds and flocks have multiplied and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied then do not exalt yourself forgetting the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery who led you through this great and terrible wilderness and an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions and in the last verse of the chapter he predicts this like the nations the Lord is destroying before you so you shall perish because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God obedience is what will allow the Israelites to enter the land and to remain in the land now we have to ask what's going on here because as Christians we believe that God saves people despite the way they act despite our obedience despite the bad things that we do why is God saying through Moses here in Deuteronomy that the Israelites salvation seems to be dependent on their obedience does the Old Testament show us a different picture of God a God who judges people according to their works to their conformity to his commandments rather than grace and if so what does the passage have to say to us well whatever Deuteronomy is teaching it's not teaching salvation by works it's not teaching that the Israelites get into the land get saved because they are good people the very next two chapters of Deuteronomy

Moses will spend about 40 verses whacking it into the Israelites heads that they're a pack of rat bags and that God is only getting them into the promised land because of his mercy and his faithfulness he says in chapter 9 verse 6 understand it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this land so you are a stiff-necked people salvation for the Israelites was as it is for us today a free gift of God a free gift of God for disobedient and sinful people but if salvation is free then it still has a shape it still has content to it the salvation that is on offer for these Israelites is not entry into the magical land of chocolate it's not even entry into the magical land of milk and honey the salvation that God offers the Israelites is entry into a place where they will live with God and serve Him and be obedient to Him it's a relationship with God in a place that God provides the danger for the Israelites you see is that they're going to want to have the place without the God they want to live in the land enjoy the prosperity of that place enjoy the milk and honey but in the end they're not going to want to have the God who gave them that place and who wants to live in that place with them so the first thing the Israelites need to remember is that God is at the centre of the salvation that He's offering to avoid falling away when they get to the land of Canaan they've got to remember to serve and love God that's what their salvation is about and I think we can fall away by forgetting that the same kind of thing too because we too are saved to an obedient relationship with God our salvation has a shape too

[16:19] I assume that none of us are so crass as to believe that God has saved us to be rich and to have lots of camels and other Israelite blessings but every now and then I come across people who tell me that the fact that they are saved by grace that God's salvation is free means that they don't have to make any that there is no difference in the way they live at all that they don't have to change the way they live or respond to God with an effort to be obedient and that's exactly the same problem God has been left out of salvation it's thinking that we can have forgiveness without the relationship that that forgiveness makes possible God's offer of salvation is free but it's not an offer of free forgiveness it's an offer of free forgiveness so we can live in relationship with God so we face the same pressure the same danger that the Israelites face and so it's no surprise that the New Testament speaking to Jesus followers makes the same kind of warnings in Matthew 7.21

Jesus says not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven if we want to avoid losing our faith then Deuteronomy 8 and Matthew 7 and many other passages in the New Testament tell us the same thing we need to make sure that we have received the real salvation that is on offer the genuine article the real offer we don't have to make sure that we have reached some standard of holiness some standard of obedience as if that's what saved us but we need to ask whether we have a commitment to living in relationship with God does living in a relationship with God actually make a difference to us can we think of times when we've actually done hard things changed our behaviour in order to be obedient to God when was the last time obedience to God cost us something forced us to be different changed our lives is obedience to God something that is part of our lives or do we need to go back and re-understand the message of our salvation again what Moses is saying here this call to obedience however isn't a call to the obedience of some strict and rigorous law code which is going to be excruciating to the Israelites to follow in Deuteronomy 10.12

Moses calls on the Israelites to obey God for their own good he tells them that it's something that will bring them good back in Deuteronomy 4 Moses says that if you obey God's laws then the benefits to you will be so great that the other nations around you will come to you and they will ask how on earth did you get to be so great and so wise where did you get this secret what has made you this great nation at the end of Deuteronomy in chapter 30 verses 19 to 20 Moses urges the Israelites to choose obedience in these terms he says choose obedience so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God listen to his voice and hold fast to him for the Lord your God is your life and he will give you many years in the land so it's no surprise you see that obedience is the great barrier to falling away for the Israelites when they do it they will experience what life is really about when they pursue obedience they will know what salvation is really about they will live in salvation they will live the life that God has set out for them and that's why it's true for us too isn't it that's why Jesus says in John chapter 4 my food is to do the will of him who sent me that's why in Matthew 4

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8 and says that man does not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord obedience is life learning to obey God brings life is the experience of life that's where life is to be found when we start to obey God all the things that distracted us pales into insignificance obedience is life so there's the first remedy for falling away according to Moses and God well if obedience to God's commands is the way the Israelites participate in their salvation and experience their salvation experience the life that God holds out to them then it's such as important for them to remember how they came into this life how they got saved in the first place remember Moses says in verse 2 remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness in order to humble you testing you to know it was in your heart whether or not you would keep his commandments he humbled you by letting you hunger then by feeding you manna which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord the clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these 40 years know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the Lord your God disciplines you

Moses says the same thing in verses 15 and 16 God led you through the great and terrible wilderness an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions he made water flow for you from flint rock and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know to humble you and to test you and in the end to do you good why does Moses bother to remind them of these things they know that God brought them out of Egypt they remember what the desert was like they've just come out of it they know about the manna they've just had it for breakfast why does Moses bother going over this stuff again and again stuff they know already the reason is they mustn't be allowed to take it for granted after a few years living in the land of Canaan what's going to happen is that it's going to seem normal to be rich and prosperous they're going to feel like they belong in the promised land they're going to imagine that the good things they enjoy are natural a result of the cycles of the seasons a result of their hard labour but this must not be allowed to happen the fact is there's nothing natural or nothing normal about their presence in the land of Canaan and their prosperity there by rights they're back in Egypt building pyramids by rights they're pieces of ash scattered around a golden calf somewhere around the base of Mount Sinai by rights they've died of disease and starvation in the desert many times over because of their disobedience the Israelite possession of the land of Canaan and the enjoyment of its prosperity is nothing more than an ongoing and continuing miracle a perpetual testimony to God's mercy and faithfulness and here again there are things that we need to hear aren't there

[23 : 55] I wonder if it seems normal to you that we live and breathe and that you go to uni or work or whatever you do that you get up in the morning and live does it seem normal to you that you come to church and expect God to hear you when you pray that God speaks to us through his word that we're able to approach him and sing his praises do these things seem normal to you they're not these things are not normal these things are extraordinary we have no right to these things the Bible tells us that history is on borrowed time every day the day that we wake up and live is a day that God has lent the world so that people will hear about Jesus by rights we have no right to be here approaching God praying to him singing his praises drawing close to him imagining that he hears us when we pray by rights God stops his ears against our hypocritical half-hearted prayers and our selfish congregation by rights we have no right to be here there is nothing normal or natural about our lives as Christians our daily survival our ability to pray the shortest prayer all these things testify to an ongoing miracle a miracle of God's salvation it's a perpetual testimony to God's intervention in history a great thing that he's done for us through the death of Jesus on the cross and through his resurrection from the dead we are here we are here in this life and we are here in this relationship with God only by the threat of God's mercy so we too need to go back over the things that God has done for us the salvation that God has brought for us just as the Israelites did too just as Moses goes back again and again to the exodus and to the provision that God made for the people so we need to go back again and again to the salvation that God has given us we need to go back to the cross we need to go back and remind ourselves and remind each other of what God has done for us in Jesus we need to remember that there is nothing natural nothing normal about our being

Christians about our being able to approach God we need to remember a crucial way to remember what God has done for us of course is by thanksgiving by giving thanks to him for it in verse 10 Moses says you shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God thank the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you there is that same reminder in verses 17 to 18 do not say to yourself my power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth but remember the Lord remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you power to get wealth so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors as he is doing today since every since their presence in the land is a testimony to God's miracle of salvation for the Israelites every good thing that they enjoy in the land is also an unnatural and extraordinary miracle of God every good thing they enjoy shows them the great mercy and kindness of God nothing good should be taken for granted

I wonder if you have this kind of attitude in your life and your relationship with God do you spend much time thanking God or thinking about the good things that he's done for you food and money and work and friendship and education relationships with other people are these things that you bother to thank God for are they things that you take for granted I think we are so ungrateful by nature us humans people give us good things or God gives us good things and we are grateful maybe for a little while and then we want more we begin to think of it as a right but Moses is telling the Israelites and the New Testament tells us many times over too that we need to be people who are thankful we need to understand the way things really are we need to understand that God is the giver of all the good things that we have we need to practice thankfulness and practice praising God we need to encourage one another in these things these are God's remedies then for falling away obedience remembering and praise and thanksgiving but how do we do these things how were the Israelites to do these things one of the things you might notice if you ever read through Deuteronomy or you may notice if you do read through Deuteronomy which is a great thing to do is how the commands that God gives through Moses are so neatly designed to help the Israelites do these things there are commands that order them to take time off and to thank God for his kindness there are special festivals where the Israelites come together and leave their farms and they go and remember what God has done for them by bringing them out of Egypt one more time there are times when they thank God for the prosperity of their fields there are days they take off they are not allowed to just lose themselves in work and the cultivation of prosperity in dozens and dozens of ways

God interferes with their lives he stops them from sinking into kind of cosy bourgeois capitalism he stops them from becoming merely materialistic selling themselves out for money and materials but of course the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament is that God doesn't seem to order the lives of Christians to the same degree that he ordered the lives of the Old Testament people I guess it's because we're recipients of the Holy Spirit God assumes that we are able to work some of these things out for ourselves that we are capable of ordering our own lives through the power of the Spirit without these needs for the same kind of exhaustive codes so while there are commands in the New Testament we're commanded to meet together we're commanded to be generous and we're commanded to be thankful the specific application of these commands is left up to us we're not told for example that we must meet every Sunday there's no command in the New Testament that says that we're not told that we have to give up a tenth of our income nothing in the New Testament that tells Christians they have to do that there's nothing that says Christians have to say grace before dinner nothing in the New Testament about that you see God assumes that you and I are responsible that we are actually sincere in our faith and that we want to put his commands into practice that we want to find ways of making these things real in our own lives and that we want to obey God and that we want to find ways of remembering God and we want to find ways of thanking God you see God takes us seriously he gives us responsibility

God treats us like grown-ups and so that means we have to act like grown-ups doesn't it we have to think about ways we can obey God and remember what God has done for us and thank God we have to think about that for ourselves and we have to think about it for each other how can we encourage one another what things can we do which will help us do these things we have to take responsibility for our lives a really practical kind of application of this principle I've tried to kind of spell out on the sheet that I've handed out I reckon maybe what we should do to kind of help ourselves be responsible is make some resolutions now resolutions are good things to do at the beginning of the year I know this isn't the beginning of the year but since there's only three months of the year left that makes it even better because there's only three months you have to remember your resolutions on the bottom right hand corner of your sheet I thought it might be helpful for us sometime not now to think of three things we could do one to think of an area where we want to be more obedient to God one thing that I can do to be reminded of the message of the cross and one way

[33 : 19] I can become more thankful to God wouldn't it be a great thing to take responsibility for our lives as God has entrusted us and to work out how we could become more obedient more mindful and more thankful let's ask God that he'll help us to do that Lord God thank you so much for the salvation you gave to the Israelites thank you for the way you encourage them to be obedient and to be mindful of the things that you had done for them and to be thankful for all the blessings that you gave them please help us to be like that too help us not to fall away as you warned them help us not to fall into the great trap the great disaster of living lives apart from you which exclude you which become distracted by the good things that you give help us to encourage one another in these things help us through the power of your spirit to be grown ups in these things we pray these things in Jesus name

Amen Amen Amen Amen