

Humility, Hope, & Love

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to turn to Deuteronomy 8 right now in your Bibles. I hope you have one before you. And Deuteronomy 8, 1 through 20, is what we're going to be thinking about over the next little while.

And as you're turning there, I do want to wish all of you a happy Mother's Day as well. It's a very different Mother's Day. It's unique during this time of crisis.

And many of us are going to be physically distant from our mothers as well. But it is a time where we can perhaps more and more appreciate who they are for us and their significance in our life, the amazing influence that they have been for you.

Recently in Britain, there was a survey that was taken to talk about how are you coping in this time of physical distancing and staying at home, maybe watching kids doing schooling at home and so forth.

And they had a number of top things in the survey. And they're very recognizable for us. They're things like we stay in touch more with family and friend virtually.

[1 : 05] And so Zoom, for instance, that we're on right now, there were 10 million users globally in December. And in April, there were 300 million.

What a change. Change is also like more people watching streaming movies. Spending more time with the people that we live with and connecting with neighbors.

More of a community spirit is the way people have coped. There was exercising inside and outside. There was a high pull for gardening and cooking and reading as well.

A number of things that you'd recognize. But the surprising thing at the end of this survey is that fewer than 1 in 10 people wanted life to return to normal after the corona crisis is passed.

Clearly, there were things that people have learned in this time of crisis and uncertainty. And in our Bible reading today, we here heard a lot about the wilderness where God's people spent 40 years.

[2 : 13] This was not wasted time. They began that time as a faithless people who complained, who turned away from God. And in this terrifying wilderness where you see in verse 15 that there are fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there's no water.

I visited there a couple of years ago. And it is very hot, like an oven when I visited in June, the worst time you can visit. And it looks like the moon. Yet this wilderness was an intensive school where God was the loving and patient teacher who brought change into the people of God.

It was a change that meant that Moses in this sermon does not ever want to go back to the old normal, but to continue on with what God has started to do in this wilderness.

And it's instructive for us. God is teaching us three life-giving lessons in and through that wilderness experience of the Israelites.

First, he teaches the humility that gives life in verses 1 through 5. And then secondly, he teaches the hope that perseveres in verses 6 through 10.

[3 : 36] And then from 11 to the end in verse 20, he teaches about the first love to remember. And I want to go through those three because they're so very relevant for us today.

First of all, the humility that gives life, Deuteronomy 8, 1 through 5. This is the great lesson of trust. And it can be summarized really in one sentence.

And that's in verse 3. It says, Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

That's a verse to remember. That is the summary of all that was taught in the desert, in the wilderness. When the original language says, We live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord, it is the sense of a mother bird who is regurgitating food in her mouth for her baby chicks.

You've all seen this on nature shows, haven't you? This is, these birds know where their life comes from. They know what their only food source is.

[4 : 47] And they clamor for that food. And in the wilderness, God takes away all the supports that his people would know so that they are like those baby birds where they clamor to the one source of life for their food and their sustenance.

And that was so important for them because they started out life of the wilderness by complaining and saying, Oh, in Egypt, at least we had plenty of food to eat. Why can't we go back there?

It's as though they were released from slavery into the wilderness. But the slavery was not released from within them. They took things into their own hands.

They tried to create a god, a golden calf, so that they could be provided for in the way that they wanted and saw fit. Imagine the arrogance of this, that they thought they could make a better god than what God could provide, that could provide what they really wanted.

But you know, you and I are tempted in exactly the same way. When God's not delivering what I want, I take things into my own hands.

[6 : 04] And this leads me into believing that I know better than God, that I cannot fully trust Him, that He is not really sovereign and in charge, as I know and have known to be true.

And we can accept this thinking as being perfectly rational, but in reality, it is as strange as those baby chicks saying, Hmm, what Mom is giving me is not good enough.

I'm going to jump out of this nest and try to find something that's even better. And so God, in His love, disciplines His people. He doesn't do it vindictively.

On Mother's Day, I think it's really good for us to know that He does it in the wise, loving, teaching way that a parent would do with their child.

And Moses says this to him as well. Verse 3 is striking. He says, God humbled you, and He let you hunger, and then He fed you with manna, just enough for the day.

[7 : 11] It's as though He was bringing them to the end of themselves in order to discover that it is in God alone that they live and move and have their being.

This is humility. It's the humility that gives life. And it's so critical for us because you and I go through wilderness times as well. As a church family, we go through them.

It might be the long wait for a building of our own, having lost our own. Or it's the inability to physically meet during a pandemic.

Or you personally may be going through this kind of thing now in your relationships, in the health that you have, in your finances, in the uncertainty as COVID, as we heard in the testimony.

But don't resent these moments when God strips things away from us. God in His love and in His power is in charge of them.

[8 : 13] And He transforms them for our good from being a curse to being a gift by bringing us to feed on God's Word, bringing us to draw near to Him, the One who loves us and died for us and is the source of all true life.

It is an important discipline because we will starve and we will not reach Heaven unless we come to the end of ourselves and discover again and again that the true food comes from God.

It comes from the bread of Heaven first and foremost. He alone is your strength. He alone has the words of eternal life. And sometimes we need to go to the wilderness to be humbled because that is the path of life.

Now secondly, the second lesson that Moses says that we learned in the wilderness, that Israel learned, is the hope that perseveres. And that's in verses 6-10.

It's amazing because Moses immediately follows this call to be faithful to God and His commands by outlining to them, by very vividly describing the good land.

[9 : 33] Look at verses 6-7. He says, So, having been in this school, you shall 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. He didn't say, you know, if all goes well and if you're really good and if you do things exactly the way I preached, you might get into that land.

No, he says, the Lord God is bringing you into a good land. It's a land where God will dwell with them, where He will, in all His glory, be their God and they will be His people.

This is the certain hope of the Bible which is so different from what that word means in a popular way today, that it is wishful thinking. And this was a great strength for Israel because they were facing the daunting task of entering a promised land where there was evil in it and they needed to take that over.

They would be tempted to all kinds of disloyalty to God and so forth. But there is this certain hope that they are hearing in this sermon that shaped their priorities, that would encourage their faith and guide them into following His word.

[10 : 54] There is this confidence in knowing that God is faithful in His promise. And that they are simply cooperating with the very powerful work that God has determined from the beginning of time to bring them into this promised land.

He is their confidence and He is their certainty. And so that's why Moses makes that hope vivid for them. He says it's a land that fills all the lackings of the wilderness beyond anything that they could possibly imagine.

Look at how he describes the abundance of water. It's a land of brooks of water of fountains and springs of flowing out in the hills and the valleys. This is a hope worth living for.

It's a longing that Moses is creating by revealing to them what God will do that actually strengthens their perseverance. You've probably, I think, heard this illustration of a factory that I think Tim Keller gave at one point.

He said, do this exercise. He says, think of a difference of working in a very dreary, mundane, assembly line job in a factory, a drab factory in very bad conditions.

[12 : 08] And you do the same thing day after day. And you've got to do it for a year at minimum wage or maybe even less. Well, you wouldn't last very long.

It'd be difficult to continue for even a few weeks. And maybe some of you have been in a job like that before. But he said, now, imagine that you are guaranteed \$30 million if you can continue in that job until the end of the year.

Would you be able to do it? Well, of course you could. You'd have a great strength to persevere. You would have no problem at all pushing through even the worst days on the assembly line.

You'd make going to work to be your great priority. Nothing would stop you from going to work every day. In fact, you might even take joy in it, knowing what is happening at the end of it because you persevered.

And in the same way, this certain hope shaped the priority of the Israelites. It encouraged their faith. It guided them into following God's word.

[13 : 12] It gave them joy in the midst of often difficult, painful times. But, you know, for us, we are empowered by Jesus in an even greater way because he himself is our living hope.

He himself is the one who guarantees an inheritance that is greater than anything we could ask or imagine. And, you know, the wonderful thing about Jesus in connection to this passage is that he came into the desert sent by his father who said, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased.

The first thing he does is he sends him into a desert for 40 days to symbolize the 40 years of God's people that we're talking about today. And there he was tested by the devil.

And in the most difficult way he was tempted. The devil said, if you are hungry, if you are the son of God, take things into your own hands and turn this rock into bread.

But Jesus said, quoting Deuteronomy 8, no, I'm trusting God. Man doesn't live by bread alone, but the words that come from God's mouth, I will feed on his word alone.

[14 : 23] And then the devil said, if you're the son of God, why don't you jump from the temple and prove to everyone who you are? You would become known instantly. And Jesus said, quoting from Deuteronomy 6, you shall not trust God.

You shall not test God. You shall not test him. And then finally, the devil said, if you bow down to me, you can save yourself. I'll give you the whole world. You don't need to go through with the agony of the cross and the sense of forsakenness on that crucifixion.

But Jesus said, quoting from Deuteronomy 6, you shall worship God only. And that humble faithfulness cultivated in the desert by Jesus meant that Jesus followed through with his mission to die on a cross and to win there a glorious and astonishing salvation that we can take for granted.

It means that he will certainly take us into a promised land as well. But it is a promised land of much greater hope and substance. It is a new, eternal heaven and earth where we will see God and we will be his people forever.

Our bodies will be transformed. And as verse 10 says, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you and you'll do it forever.

[15 : 50] God shapes you by that blessing that is before you, by that inheritance, by that land ahead of you. And your longing for that place leads you and it leads me to persevere with our faithfulness to God, with our depending upon him for our life, even in the very toughest times.

It gives you the strength to begin the life of heaven now, blessing the Lord God as we bless the world with the news of this Jesus who gives us eternal life.

And then finally, Moses teaches them about the first love to remember in verses 11 through 20. Now this is a section where there are three very strong warnings that Moses gives.

And you can see them in verses 11, 17, and 19. Look at verse 11. It says, take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments.

And then the second one says, beware, lest you say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.

[17 : 07] You shall remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you the power to get wealth that he may confirm the covenant that he swore to your fathers as it is this day.

And then finally, he says, if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

Those are strong words because Moses knows that you and I are in spiritual danger if we forget God.

It is a very serious thing. It is the worst thing to fall into for the people of God. Because here's how the way it works. you work very hard in this promised land, this fertile land.

You're farming, you're mining, you're expanding your work, you're enjoying the fruits of your labor. And God gets pushed to the background of your life. You stop listening to his voice.

[18 : 11] Your pride builds and another voice takes over. As it says here, you say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.

Now I want you to raise your hand if you've ever said that or believe that. Well I can't see you on Zoom fortunately so you don't need to worry about it. But if you're honest, you probably have.

And this is the deadly diagnosis of the disease of spiritual amnesia. It is the disease that Moses is revealing to us today.

It leads to taking on the worship of other gods, the gods in your life, like wealth and prosperity, success and health.

And Moses strongly warns us that those, that disease leads to death. Our pandemic shows that the wealth and the life and security of this world can be stripped away in an instant.

[19 : 19] The gods of this world are shown to be powerless. They are shown to be not worth even considering staking our life on and putting our trust in.

So the question is how do we vaccinate ourselves against this disease? Well Moses says it is by remembering. Remembering is important in our society.

We celebrate Mother's Day today because we remember the incredible gift that our mothers are. And I love it that at 7 o'clock in the evening we hear all kinds of noise especially here at the office because we're near hospitals and so forth but we hear the banging of pots.

We even hear police caravans going down the street with their sirens making all kinds of noise. Why? To remember the wonderful loving sacrifice of frontline workers as they care for those who are sick by COVID-19.

It is important for us to remember we know that in this society but remembering is even more important in the Christian life. God teaches us here to remember our first love.

[20 : 29] There is only one God as we heard last week in Deuteronomy 6 and we are to love that God with all our heart with all our mind with all our souls. It's the fundamental relationship in our life.

This remembering is very active. It is feeding on God's word by keeping his commandments Moses says. It's rejoicing in his promises.

It's following his teachings. It's by knowing God in that word that you depend upon to be your life. We also remember him every time we pray.

and even that little act of saying grace at our meal we are remembering that every good thing comes from the hand of God for us.

We remember him every time we gather together by serving him by loving our neighbor in Jesus name. And we give thanks we remember God as we give our life to him as a living sacrifice that is willing to give ourselves for him out of love for what he has done for us.

[21 : 40] This is what it means to remember. And remembering is so important that Jesus gives us the sacrament of Holy Communion. Why? To remember him. To rehearse his good news for us.

To renew our fellowship with him and his death for us. And we give God thanks today for the gift of the Holy Spirit who inhabits that word that is our life God's word.

We give thanks for the Holy Spirit who leads us as the living God to remember everything that Jesus taught us that we might love Jesus with all of our life.

So now let us draw near to Jesus who is our bread of life. He has the words of eternal life. So may we persevere in putting our trust in him because God is the one Lord and he alone is worthy of our trust and our honor and our glory forever and ever.

Amen. And now I just think it's a wonderful thing that we have a new song that we are going to be learning and singing and this song teaches us exactly the lesson of this Bible reading.

[22 : 56] It asks what is our one hope in life and death and we sing the answer Christ alone Christ alone.

Amen.