

You Can't Escape History

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[0 : 00] You can't escape from history is the subject today.

And it's Deuteronomy 4, 9 to 14. And I'm going away tomorrow to Toronto, a missionary to Toronto, and tell them how to make the economy work the way we can.

They would no doubt be glad to hear me tell them. I'm sure they would be. But I had a friend in from Toronto who's in the construction business this week.

I don't think he's here. But he said, in Toronto, there are no cranes. And we counted seven coming across the Granville Bridge.

So something good's happening in Vancouver. It turns him green anyway. So that was... Because I'm going and because I live in the existential agony of wanting to get to know all of you and never having the opportunity, I've written you a letter, sort of farewell letter, until I come back in two weeks.

[1 : 14] And it's available as you go out the door. It doesn't tell you who to vote for. It doesn't ask for money. So don't be afraid. It's just a friendly letter.

And even if it won't tell me who you are, it may tell you a little bit about where I'm at, what I'm doing. The great thing that Lisa always did...

However... This one. Yeah. Sorry about that.

Okay. So many parts. It's not... It's like a security blanket for me. I don't really need it. But I...

It's nice to have it on hand. The... I thought it was candy. It was like... This is October the 6th.

[2 : 18] And it was fascinating to read in the paper just two or three weeks ago about a lady who went by the name of Catherine Ann Power, who as a co-ed student at Brandeis University became involved with the...

One of the violent anti-Vietnam groups in those days, went in for bank robbery to support some of their endeavors, was involved in a robbery which involved shooting a policeman by the name of...

Yes, ma'am. You don't think I'm plugged in? Now watch.

Right? Right? Natural walkthrough. The...

Catherine Ann Power has since that time in 1970 lived as Alice Lewis Metzenger in Lebanon, Oregon.

[3 : 39] She has a 14-year-old son and a husband. And she went back to Boston about a month ago and gave herself up because she had been on a most wanted list for a long, long time.

Her picture was still in the police stations in Boston. And she confessed who she was.

She has been cut off from her family since then simply because they can't know where she lives. She went back because she wants to put her life in order.

There is the memory of this thing in her heart which she wants to deal with. Now, to my mind, there's probably a story behind the story and I'm not going to speculate what it is.

But it said in the paper then that on October the 6th, sentence would be passed on her. So we might hear something about it in the news. What did they say?

[4 : 38] In prison, I think it was for 10 years, no probation, 25 years or something like that. And she's not allowed to tell her life story to me now.

So, boy, that's pretty heavy. But she said that she was prepared to do that because of this problem in her own mind.

So I tell you that because I want to give you the kind of picture of a person who has, if you want, in their heart something fairly heavy that's there and they can't escape from.

And this obviously was in her heart for 23 years before she finally decided she had to deal with it and she's gone to court now and dealt with it and been dealt with.

The policeman's family were very thoughtful of her when they heard that she had given herself up. I don't know whether that's the end of the story or not, but it's a story of somebody who has something fairly difficult in their lives.

[6 : 06] I was blown right away this morning when in our breakfast Bible study, we read a passage in Isaiah 44 which talked about people that didn't know that they had a lie in their right hand which they were protecting.

And it's a magnificent picture, I thought. People carrying around or nurturing a lie in their right hand. Not their left hand. This is in their right hand.

And they won't let go of it. And they're not even aware that that's there. And I think that it's another kind of picture of carrying in our heart a remembrance that is very, very damaging.

Because in our lives, we try, in a sense, escape from history. In the world that we live in, every opportunity is given to us to escape from history.

When one day is finished, it's over and forgotten about, and you move on to the next day. Happy and fulfilled, and the world is there for the taking.

[7 : 37] And that kind of view of human life is prevalent in our society. That you deliberately exercise amnesia towards what's gone past.

not knowing that you have a lie in your right hand. Or, as this woman from Oregon did, a stone in her heart that was destroying her and making life impossible for her.

And with some people, the stone is that I've lost a loved one and I haven't taken the time to mourn.

For some people, it's that I'm suffering from what I think they call it a dramatic stress experience.

You know, where you've been through a very acute experience of stress. And that stays as a kind of stone. And in the night, you can't escape from the remembrance of it.

[8 : 49] So that lots of people live their lives with that kind of secret. Maybe abuse you suffered as a child of one kind or another.

Which is a remembrance that you have in your heart that continues to destroy you because it's right at the center of your life.

And we can't escape from them. And I think probably what counselors do most of the time nowadays, and it's a huge business, is help you to talk about the secret you have in your right hand or the problem you have in your heart that you can't and won't deal with.

And that's the kind of picture that I want you to have. What is your heart stored with? What is there? And what is it doing?

And then I want you, having got that picture there, either, you know, the lie which is in your right hand, the stone which is in your heart.

[10 : 15] What happens then when you turn to Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 9, where it says, Be careful and watch yourself closely so that you do not forget the things you have seen.

Don't let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Now, what what Moses is doing, remember, he is forging out of some very raw material a nation of people.

He's taken a scallywag group of slaves that have been in slavery for centuries and he's forging out of them a nation.

And he tells them, Now, the thing you've got to do is you've got to be careful and watch yourselves closely. And it's, do you know what the next problem is, Mert?

No. It wasn't meant to be. Here we are. This is not a golf course.

[11 : 38] This is, there we are now. This is a fortress.

And this is what he's talking about in verse 9. To watch the fortress within which you live closely and to guard carefully things your eyes have seen so that you don't let them escape from your heart.

Take care to be on your guard. That's what the Jerusalem Bible says at that verse. And then it says, As you value your life, take care of what gets in here into the fortress of your being.

That's what he's saying in verse 9. Guard yourself carefully and guard very carefully your desire or your soul.

soul. You've got to protect yourself because the remembrance of the wrong thing can get in there and destroy you.

[12 : 47] And Moses says, I want you to guard in there the remembrance of the God who delivered you from Egypt. That's got to be at the center of your life.

that historical event has got to be there. And Moses wants to give you the equipment with which to guard yourself.

And so he goes on and tells you this is what you are to have stored in your heart for as long as you live through the whole of your life.

I mean, I think of the devastating news of the earthquake in India and the death of 20 to 30,000 people.

What do you do with that? I mean, if you became obsessed with it and it became the only thing in there, you would be in great trouble.

[13 : 46] So that you've got to, in a sense, make room for that. But to say to the God who brought you out of Egypt, the God who gave his son to die for you on the cross, why does this happen?

And what are we to do in a world where this can happen? How are we to respond? But if there's nothing in your heart, when you hear that news, it's just, there's nothing you can do with it.

There's no place you can turn. It can only destroy you, churn up, perhaps, anger and resentment and unbelief in your heart and put you in a state of rebellion, which state of rebellion will as surely destroy you as the earthquake destroyed them?

And that's the picture that Moses says. He says, I don't want you to forget these things, things that your eyes have seen.

And remember, he says that you have to keep this in place so that the things that your eyes have seen, you won't forget. Now, what your eyes see are the events of history.

[15 : 02] Remember, last week, we were careful to look at the next verses, which say to you, don't imagine what your eyes see.

Only what, don't create a kind of fiction of that. Remember that you didn't see anything of God. You saw no form.

So he says, what your eyes did see, you saw Moses exalted to leadership, you saw Moses challenge Pharaoh, you saw Moses rally your people, you saw Moses lead you through the Red Sea, you saw Moses lead you for 40 years in the wilderness, you saw Moses ascend Mount Horeb in your name and confront God as God confronted him and then confronted you.

You saw that. Now, he says, that's history and don't forget it because for the people of the Old Testament, that is the central event of history.

Let me, let me just read to you a part from Deuteronomy chapter 26 because it tells you how you're to remember it.

[16 : 23] It gives you a beautiful illustration of how it's to be remembered and this is what it says. He says to them, when you have entered the land, these are several verses so you're going to have to listen to quite a few.

When you have entered the land, the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, take some of the first fruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land, the Lord your God is giving you, and put them in a basket.

So there you are with a basket of first fruits. then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling place for his name and say to the priest in office at the time, this is what you say, I declare to the Lord your God that I have come to the land the Lord swore to our forefathers to give us.

The priest shall take the basket from your hands, set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God. Then you shall declare before the Lord your God.

My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. The Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor.

[17 : 50] Then we cried out to the Lord and the Lord God of our fathers and the Lord heard our voice, saw our misery. toil and oppression.

So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us out to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

And now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, O Lord, have given me. Place the basket before the Lord your God, bow down before him, and you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord has given to you and your household.

So that what he's to do is to go before the Lord with this basket of first fruits and say, you're the God who brought us out of Egypt. You're the God who gave Moses to us.

You're the God that has brought us into this land. You see, that remembrance is built into his heart. The remembrance of that event in history. Now, we live with that kaleidoscopic change in all the pattern of history all the time.

[19 : 08] So we don't remember anything. And that's why Moses says, guard yourself. Guard your very life. Don't let it slip out of your heart that God has acted in history.

And don't try and escape. from the history of God's intervention. So remember. And that's the way he talks to them. All the way through.

He says, don't let it slip from your heart. Build it into your heart. Build it into the heart of your children. Build it into the heart of your children's children.

children. Now, what he's saying is that what you've got to do is make sure that this is firmly in your heart, this event of history in which God confronted us.

You then make sure that it's firmly in the heart of your children. children. And then you fulfill your grand parental responsibility by making sure it's in the heart of your children's children.

[20 : 21] So matter what the days of their life may be, they relate to the central event of history where God met them at Horeb. And I suspect that that's the reason it's important to tell the story of Jonah to your grandchildren.

And the story of Daniel. And the story of Noah's ark. And the story of God creating the world in seven days. And the story of Abraham. And the story of Joseph.

And the story of the giving of the Ten Commandments. And the story of Jeremiah the prophet. All those things we are to make present as the central reality of history.

history is full to overflowing with things that happen. But not of the order of God choosing, selecting, and speaking to a nation, and appearing to them, and speaking to them.

That is unique in history. And that's the event that has got to be central in your heart. That God did this. and then everything else that crowds in on your heart has to be related to this central event of history.

[21 : 45] And if that central event isn't there at the heart, then you might as well, your fortress is gone. Your heart slips away.

Everything is gone. So he says, you are to stand there. And you stood there before the Lord and you are to remember that.

You heard his words, you are to remember them. You learned to fear me, you are to continue to fear me in reverent worship. And you are to teach your children that this day may be a day for them.

Now this isn't an unusual thing, in fact I think this is probably the prototype from which you and I, I'm reading a book, this is a help you go to sleep book at night.

I can't read the Bible then because I get too excited and don't go to sleep. I'm reading Farley Mowat's visit to Siberia.

[22 : 55] And last night he was describing all the cognac and all of, he seems to have the specialty on describing food and drink. But in this Siberian city of Yakutsk, which on November the 7th in 1966 was draped with red flags everywhere in pictures of Lenin and pictures of Marx, a massive celebration and everybody from everywhere came back and the planes were flying into this terribly remote place and the population doubled and quadrupled for this celebration of the October revolution, which he said was the great celebration.

I don't know how it will go this year. But it was then. And that was the thing that drew the people together and gave them some identity.

Now in Canada, we have the gray cup. And it's going to be hard when it's played in Texas, but we will persevere.

I mean, it's there. But you remember how some people want to remember the Holocaust or they want to remember Hiroshima Day or they want to remember, I mean, we have a remembrance day in which we try very hard, it seems with less and less success, to get people to remember the soldiers who went and fought for this country in two great wars.

We try to get them to remember. We try to put that into their heart so that they will know who they are nationally. And we as Canadians are not very good on having much that draws us together as people.

- [24 : 55] And I think we need to be concerned about that. But you see, the thing that Moses is telling them is remember this day that God spoke to you and remember what he said. that. And so that this was the great sort of memorable event in history. There were clouds and darkness and flames, but you were there and the Lord spoke to us and you heard him.
- Now, you see, the interesting parallel to that is, of course, that song which I mentioned before, were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed him to the cross?
- Were you there when they laid him in the tomb? Were you there when he rose up from the dead? You know, the answer to that question is yes, you were.
- Because that is a moment of history in which God acted and therefore stands out from every other moment in history.
- [26 : 05] And that moment in history is one that has to be in a sense emblazoned in your heart. It's got to be carefully guarded at the center of your being because that's the basis on which your life is built.
- And you see, if your life isn't built on something like that, you're going to be in great trouble. Let me read to you a verse again from Deuteronomy when Moses says, after telling them all the delight of the promised land into which they're going.
- But then the chapter ends by saying, if you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.
- well, the reason you will be destroyed is because you collapsed from the inside. You have forgotten.
- Now, in our society, people are prepared to forget. But you see, it's that moment that badly needs to be remembered.
- [27 : 26] These are the things that happened. You see, Moses was appointed. Moses called together a people. Moses challenged Pharaoh. Moses led them through the Red Sea. Moses led them into the wilderness. Moses brought them to Mount Horeb. Moses led them for 40 years. Moses brought them to the shores of the Jordan. And Moses said to them, from the top of Mount Pisgah, there's the land that God has given to you.
- Go and possess it. they saw all that. And that was the evidence to them of the purpose of God, which they were to keep and remember at the center of their lives.
- Now, for you and me, who live in the revelation, as it were, of the New Testament, that is the pattern of our lives.
- We have known another kind of slavery. slavery. We know another kind of wilderness. We know another law which transcends the law that was given in the Ten Commandments.
- [28 : 35] We know of another land which is promised to us, which is a heavenly city, which hath foundation. We know of another covenant in which God has unconditionally committed himself to us.
- And that, you see, is what Moses was saying to them. And remember that the New Testament calls that the dispensation of death.
- That that had no promise of life in the Old Testament. That came with the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. That was a dispensation of death which was nevertheless central because it gave them the focus of their trust in God.
- You see, for us the same thing happens in that at the heart of our life is to be that moment of history in which Jesus Christ was taken by wicked hands, was tried, was scourged, was crucified, was dead, and buried.

That moment in history we are never to forget. It's to be central. We can't understand or know history or even know who we are apart from it.

[30 : 04] And you see, that moment in history then leads into the moment in history when beyond anything that we could imagine, God acted in raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

That's the moment in history which is central to our lives. So that no matter what there is stored in your heart which produces anger or shame or guilt or envy, whatever is in your heart, it should be in a sense smaller than and ultimately of infinitely less consequence than the moment in history in which God acted and in which God spoke.

That moment which is to be enshrined in our hearts and lives. And if you forget that, you will be destroyed because the walls will all come tumbling down.

The fortress will be gone. And what will have happened is what the other side of what Moses says to them.

He says, be careful and watch yourself so that you don't forget these things, the things your eyes have seen. You let them slip from your heart.

[31 : 41] Don't do it as long as you live. Keep that remembrance central in your life. And that's what Moses is telling these people.

Now, I mean, I think there is a real agony for us, humanly and politically speaking as a Canadian nation because there isn't very much that we have in common that binds us together as a nation.

And as Christians, we need to pray and think a good deal about that and wonder how God in his grace could give us something. And when we sing, when we sing our song, we sing about, what is it?

We sing about geography, basically, about plains and ice and mountains and rivers and streams and stuff like that. But geography isn't enough to hold us together.

We need something at the heart of our nation in the same way that God has put at the heart of our membership in the kingdom the historical reality of that moment in history when God made it very clear who he was and what his purpose was.

[32 : 57] And we have to put that at the center of our lives. Let me say a prayer. Our God and Father, it seems amazing to me that we have in these ancient words of scripture the story of how a nation is built and the directions you gave for the building of the nation and the leadership you gave to do it.

thank you that that is that the second Moses who is Jesus Christ has come and has established a kingdom and at the center of that kingdom is your covenant and commitment to us.

We want to respond to that which you've done for us by giving our lives to you. God help us in these troubled and difficult times in which we want to escape from history and we want to find spontaneously in our own hearts the things that just aren't there.

And how so often we end up dealing with the woundedness and hurt in our hearts and producing not faith and love and worship but producing anger and envy and malice.

Our God help us not to escape from history. We ask in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

[34 : 50] Thank you.