

Take Care Lest You Forget (Duet 8:1-20)**Matthew Williams****5/28/2023**

Since the Civil War, more than 1 million men and women have died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. World War I and World War II alone are responsible for over half the total. The religious freedom of assembly we're enjoying right now is a direct result of their sacrifice. We owe them a debt of gratitude that's easy to overlook. How quickly we forget.

And yet forgetting is common to man. We forget homework assignments. We forget our keys. We forget to pick something up at the store. We forget kids' birthdays or how many years we've been married. Forgetting touches young and old alike, though it can be uniquely painful in the latter years of life if dementia sets in and you struggle to remember the names of our own family members.

Whether the underlying cause is human frailty or a degenerative disease, we think of forgetting as something that happens to us, not something we consciously choose to do. It's an accident, an unfortunate occurrence we apologize for, not a sin we confess or for which we are morally responsible. In many cases, that's true. But there's another sort of forgetting that is very much a moral issue, for which all will give an account to God. It's a form of forgetting that left unaddressed will destroy your soul.

Though it's common to man, it's not an innocent thing. It's a deadly serious thing. I'm talking about ingratitude that forgets our utter and complete dependence on a merciful God for life and breath and everything. Forget that my friends, and you will die. It's what brought about Israel's demise. Psalms 78:42, "They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe."

They forgot their dependence on God and the sustaining power of his Word. They forgot his faithfulness to his Word was the source of every good thing they enjoyed. They forgot they owed their very life to him. The same is true for you, friend. Acts 17:25, "He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." And it is doubly true if you know the joy of trusting and obeying Jesus! 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, "And because of him[God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Why? Deuteronomy 30:20, “For he is your life.” Walking in the path of God’s commands is the only path of life. Deuteronomy 8:1, “The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live...” Moses says as much over and over again in the first seven chapters of Deuteronomy. Only those who embrace the obedience of faith will experience the covenant-faithfulness of God. But he doesn’t just tell Israel what she must do to experience the life God is eager to give her. He tells her how to do it. How do you keep “The whole commandment” (verse 1)? By practicing verse 2. By remembering “The whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years...”

Why do we fail to trust and obey? Because we forget. What will empower you to trust and obey? Being careful to remember. **You will keep God’s Word to the degree you remember your utter dependence on God’s Word for life and breath and everything.** If keeping is the fruit, remembering is the root. If keeping is the end, remembering is the means. A humble heart remembers. A proud heart forgets. Those are the two points Moses makes to Israel and hence the two points of this sermon.

1) A HUMBLE HEART REMEMBERS (verse. 1-10)

What exactly does Israel need to remember about the last forty years? The four decades that have passed since the Lord delivered her from oppression in Egypt? Four decades she spent wandering a desert wilderness on account of her refusal to trust and obey the Lord? What’s the big thing God’s been working to accomplish? It’s an attitude Moses identifies in the middle of verse 2. “Remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you...that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart...”

God wasn’t testing her because he lacked knowledge. Israel was the one who needed to see the truth of her spiritual condition. The “Knowing” in verse 2 describes a process of God bringing something into the light, revealing to Israel the truth of her spiritual condition. He orchestrated the circumstances of her life to reveal depth of her need for God and her dependence on the Lord’s provision and protection. In a word, the Lord worked to humble her. A heart that cries out, “Lord, I need you! Lord, I trust you! Lord, I depend on you!” was the divinely intended effect.

Wandering in the wilderness wasn’t a cruel punishment. It was an act of loving discipline. The Father’s way of teaching Israel to walk in the humility of dependence. Look at verse 3. “And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna...” Manna was a wafer-like substance the Lord rained down from heaven every night to

feed Israel in the desert for 40 years. They had never seen it before, so they called it manna, literally, “What is it?”

But before he sent manna, he first let her go hungry. Why? Because painful trials are the sweetest of mercies when they awaken you to your need for the Lord. One of the kindest things God will ever do for you, friend, is give you a sense of how much you are dependent on him for life and breath and everything. And that kind of humility is uniquely acquired through the school of suffering, in situations like work, school, sports, marriage, parenting, discipleship, poverty and sickness that bring us face with our weakness.

God humbled Israel and he humbles us today so that we might know something. And I’m not talking about an intellectual, check-box-because-it’s-true kind of knowledge. I’m talking about an experiential, I’ve tasted-and-seen kind of knowledge. The end of verse 3 is the sum and substance of our existence as creatures. This is the conviction and this is the kind of humility that God was after in Israel’s heart. “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by all (or every word) that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

His point is not you need to read God’s Word just as much as you need to eat breakfast, though that’s true! His point is that every human being has a choice to make. Does life come from what I create for myself by my power? Or does life come from what God creates for me by the word of his power? Which one is it? Am I a self-sufficient Creator? Or am I a dependent creature? Which story are you living by, friend?

The biblical answer to so many of our anxieties – anxieties at work, anxieties at home, anxieties about our anxiety – is not more rest in the sense of more self-care, more me-time, or more vacations. It’s repentance. It’s rejecting and refusing to embrace the lie that you have power to create, sustain, or restore life for your family, your business, your church, your friends, or even your own body through the work you do. You are not the Creator. God is the Creator. You are not the Redeemer. God is the Redeemer.

How does God create? By the power of voice. Psalms 33:9, “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm”. The reason earth keeps spinning and you keep breathing is ultimately the same. Hebrews 1:3, “He (Jesus) upholds the universe by the word of his power.” So how does God redeem? How does God restore what sin has broken in his good creation? By the power of his voice. Psalms 107:20, “He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.”

What sort of word does that? It's the Word of the gospel, the good news of Jesus and all he has done to accomplish salvation for mankind. 1 Corinthians 15:1–2, "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you..."

God's Word doesn't just give us information about God, expressing his thoughts or desires. It's how God acts in the world. When God wants to get something done, what does he do? He speaks a Word. He sends out his Word. Ultimately, in a Son kind of way he does this by sending the Word Made Flesh (Hebrews 1:2). God's Word is his power in action. He gives us physical life by the word that comes from his mouth. And he gives us spiritual life by the word that comes from his mouth.

That's humbling. On every front, in every way, we are dependent on the Word of God. And he proved as much to Israel through more than a daily food delivery. Look at verse 4. "Your clothing did not wear out on you and your feet did not swell these forty years." Having logged some serious miles backpacking over the years, I can confirm the experience of the average Revolutionary War soldier. When you walk a lot of miles, your feet swell. Shoes wear out.

What was Israel's experience? No swelling. Same clothing. And it wasn't Gore-Tex or a sun-resistant fabric. It was a remarkable expression of God's providential, life-sustaining care down to the smallest level of detail. The appropriate response is not "Oh, that's cool!" or "How interesting!" No. God was instructing. God was disciplining Israel in a formative kind of way. He taught them through the clothing on their back and the intact skin on their feet that "Man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." Know in your heart, Israel, you are dependent on me.

Moses isn't talking about intellectual orthodoxy. Yes, pastor, I mentally assent that I am dependent on God. No. Look at the end of verse 6. He's talking about the fear of the Lord, a trembling awe grounded in the depth of our need and the wonder of God's provision. It's a dependence on God that leads to delight in God. It's not, "Unfortunately, I need you. Thanks for the help. I'll try not to bother you too much." No, it's a heart that cries out, "Jesus, thank you for mercies that are new every morning. Give me this day my daily bread. I need you and I praise you for your faithfulness to me."

And yet Moses isn't merely talking about a Christian version of Memorial Day. Humility remembers more than what God has done in the past. It remembers all God has promised us in the future. Both past grace and future grace are kept in view. Verse 7,

“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the 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 in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of those hills you can dig copper.”

What’s his point? Those who humbly look to God for life instead of trying to create life for themselves do more than survive. They thrive! They don’t just find life. They find abundant life! The physical joys of Canaan were everything the wilderness could not provide. Friends, the life Jesus offers you is everything the world cannot provide. He came to give you life! More friends? More screen-time? Fewer challenges? More vacations? No. Something immeasurably better.

Psalms 4:6–7, “There are many who say, ‘Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!’ You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.” It’s the joy of knowing and being loved by our Father in heaven. It’s a life we experience now in part and one day in full when the Edenic splendor of Canaan is swallowed up by the glory of the new heavens and the new earth.

If you remember your dependence on the Lord to give you life and obey him accordingly, Psalms 31:19 describes your guaranteed inheritance. “Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!” None who wait for him shall be put to shame.

And when you remember, when you experience, when you anticipate God’s blessings, what does a humble heart say? “It’s about time you did something good for me, God. I mean, it’s not like I’ve been waiting a while or anything. It’s not like you’ve been blessing Johnny over there who could give a rip about keeping your law while I’m over here doing what’s right but still struggling to pay the bills.”

That’s not humility, brothers and sisters. That’s self-righteousness. Verse 10 captures the voice of humble remembrance. “You shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.” Or in the words of Psalms 107:8, “Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!” If you want life-sustaining, joy-producing power to obey the “Whole commandment,” remember the “Whole way” the Lord has led you. Remember his past mercies. Remember his future mercies. Then trust and obey him accordingly. A humble heart remembers.

2) A PROUD HEART FORGETS (verse 11-20)

Moses is a good shepherd. He doesn't just explain the put on. He also explains the put off. Be careful to do this and be careful to not do that. Verse 11, "Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today..." Slow down and think about the logic of that statement. Moses isn't just repeating verses 1-2. He's building on them, saying two things that are critically important.

First, you can't separate our choice to remember and our choice to obey. The whole point of Deuteronomy 8 is that they're two sides of the same coin. The choice to not keep God's commands is a choice to not remember our dependence on him for life. And the choice to not remember our dependence on him is a choice to disobey his commands. Either way, it's a choice. And the warning, "Take care lest you forget" implies that while our default setting is to forget, remembering is possible. But it doesn't happen automatically. It's the result of careful, deliberate effort, the fruit of "Taking care" to call to mind, consider, and meditate on who God is, what he's done for us, and our absolute dependence on his Word.

Second, one of the most important ways we remember the Lord is by keeping his commands! Notice the little word "By" in the middle of verse 11. "Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments." In other words, keeping God's commands isn't just the result of remembrance. It's a means of remembrance. The act of obeying God's command expands our awareness and experience of the truth of God's worth and value. It actually causes us to remember! And the act of disobeying God's command diminishes our awareness and experience of the truth of God's worth and value. It causes us to forget.

Let me give you an example. What kind of person obeys God's command to practice radical generosity? A person who remembers their absolute dependence on God's generosity. But I'm not that kind of person, Matthew. I'm stingy with my time, my money, you name it. I struggle to remember God's faithfulness to provide. How can I grow? Well, I'll tell you, friend, or rather I'll say what God himself tells you in verse 11.

If you want to grow in remembering God's radical generosity, then you must choose to practice radical generosity! If we forget the Lord by not keeping his commands, we remember the Lord by keeping his commands! And we get better at remembering the more we keep God's commands because keeping God's command forces us to walk by faith.

Think about it. What happens when we step out in obedient trust by practicing generosity? We experience more and more of God's faithfulness. Proverbs 11:25, "Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered." And our experience of God's generosity strengthens our awareness of his generosity, which helps us to remember his generosity and compels us to keep practicing generosity!

Bottom line, don't wait to obey until you feel humble and find yourself spontaneously remembering the goodness of the Lord. Strengthen your humility, deepen the wellspring of your remembrance by choosing to obey. And why, you ask, is remembering and strengthening our remembrance through our obedience so important? Because pride is crouching at the door. Take care, verse 12, "Lest when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them," verse 13, "And all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God..."

Brothers and sisters, forgetting the goodness of the Lord and our dependence on his Word is not a result of old age or being a Christian a long time. It's the fruit of pride. It's the fruit of a heart that is "Lifted up." Verse 17, "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.'"

Why is there a relative absence of suffering in my life? That's the fruit of my wise choices. From where came the godly character, professional success, or athletic achievement I've found? That's the fruit of my hard work. What is the cause of the good behavior my kids display? That's the fruit of my parenting. What about the physical health I enjoy? That's the fruit of my discipline with diet and exercise. How have all these people been positively impacted by my gospel ministry? Not to boast or anything, but yeah, I did that.

No you didn't, friend. You didn't do any of that by your own power. All of that, every single bit of that, is a sovereign expression of God's work in your life. That kind of attitude is self-sufficiency speaking and self-achievement boasting. And beneath all of it is a proud, ungrateful heart that refuses to remember the Lord's benefits. Give thanks for his benefits, and depend on his benefits. Because you like to believe that even if they are "His" benefits, it was your power that ensured he sent them in your direction.

Brothers and sisters, when we forget the Lord, we cross out his name in the story of his faithfulness and arrogantly write in our own. So slow down and consider, who is this one whom pride would have you forget? What does Moses tell Israel?

Verse 14, he's the God who delivered you from Egypt. Christian, has not your God delivered you from sin and death through the gospel of his Son? The gift of himself, that is the most unspeakably great gift that he could ever give you! Would you belittle his saving grace, forgetting the Lord as someone of no worth or value?

Verse 15, he's the God who led you through the "Great and terrifying wilderness." Christian. Have you not experienced the Father's comfort and guidance through the darkest nights of the soul? Even when your suffering was a result of your own sin, like Israel. Has he not continued to graciously convict you, restore you, preserve you, and lead you in paths of righteousness? Would you belittle his preserving grace, forgetting the Lord as someone of no worth or value?

Verse 15, he's the God who "Brought you water out of the flinty rock." The wilderness is not a hospitable place. It's filled with lifeless rocks. It's the last place you would expect to find water. Christian, has not your God used all manner of "flinty rock" situations for your good? Situations where you said, "Nothing good here!" and yet that was the very relationship, the very hardship, the very trial, the Spirit used to deepen your knowledge and love for Jesus. Would you belittle his supernatural grace, forgetting the Lord as someone of no worth or value?

Verse 16, he's the God who "Fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know." All the Israelites standing alive around Moses had ever eaten for 40 years was manna. How easy it would have been to take it for granted after week 7? Christian, has God not provided for you in wonderful ways that are easily overlooked? Maybe you didn't see it at the time, but looking back, the spouse he gave you, the church he placed you in, the friend you "Happened" to meet, the job he gave you, the parents who introduced you to Jesus however imperfectly, what kindness!

Ok, Matthew, I get the point. My entire life, from beginning to end, is a testimony to the faithfulness of God. But here's the deal. When push comes to shove, I don't like being dependent. I don't like being weak. I don't like needing God's help so much or always being the person asking for prayer. Can't I just enjoy a little bit of sufficiency for just a day or two? Sure, we all need God from time to time, but 40 years of dependence, the wilderness I'm still living in, surely there's a better way.

Friend, the wilderness isn't a knock against God. It's an expression of his love and care for you. He loves you too much to not humble you. He's teaching you to walk by faith because the path of faith, the path of joyful dependence, is the only path that leads to home. Verse 16, God is testing you "To do you good in the end."

The “Good” end God has in view is more than copper and iron ore lying all over the place in Canaan or suffering and death being no more in heaven! As sweet as those gifts are and will be, they pale in comparison to the joy of walking in daily dependence on the Shepherd of our souls. The wilderness itself is an expression of God’s goodness. For by humbling us, by bringing us face to face with our insufficiency, our inadequacy, our daily need and his daily provision, the Spirit opens to us the door of life. For true life is reserved for those who walk in cheerful dependence on the God who provides.

Dependence is an exceedingly good thing when the arm on which you lean is the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. Knowing him is the best gift of gifts. So when God does a man or woman good, he does whatever is necessary to burn in our souls a conviction that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. You’re not the Creator. He is. You’re not the Redeemer. He is. Knowing that, believing that and delighting in that, is the secret to true joy.

CONCLUSION

A proud heart forgets. A humble heart remembers. Remembers what? Our dependence on the Word of God. Verse 18, “For it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” We serve a God who keeps his promises. His Word of promise is the explanation for Israel’s life. It is the only explanation for your life, Christian. For in Jesus, the Son of God who lived for you, died for you, and rose from the grave for you, all the promises of God are yes and amen.

Remember what he has done for you through the power of his Word. Remember what he will do for you through the power of his Word. And keep his Word accordingly. **Keep God’s Word by remembering your dependence on God’s Word.** For it is your very life!

If you forget and wander down other paths, following the pride in your heart, chasing satisfaction in other places, you will die. Three times in verse 19-20 Moses solemnly warns Israel. If you stop remembering him, depending on him, obeying him, you will “Surely perish.” As the nations of Canaan perish before you, so too you will perish. Why? Because God doesn’t play favorites. Only those who keep his Word by remembering their utter dependence on his Word will live.

Don’t be like Nebuchadnezzar who declared in Daniel 4:30, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” Declare with the prophet (Isaiah 26:12), “You have indeed done for us all our works.” And with the psalmist (Psalms 115:1), “Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your

name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!" Take care, KingsWay, lest you forget. On Memorial Day weekend, let's be people who remember.