

Living as God's Covenant People  
Studies in Deut. 1-11, #6

## ""Remembering of the Covenant" Deuteronomy 8

--CEFC 7/23/17;

---

How many Texans do we have here this morning?

Let me ask you Texans--

Have you ever had one of those days when nothing went right;  
you felt dull and listless--

you crawl into bed at night and realize that for a whole day  
you had forgotten the Alamo?

Only a Texan could appreciate that--

for remembering the Alamo is a duty down there in the Lone Star State--

it's a point of identity,  
and a source of inspiration and strength.

"Remember the Alamo!" /

Now, I realize that for most of us,

coming from the other 49 or beyond, that motto means nothing.

When we think of Texas we may think of

bar-b-que, boots, and the Dallas Cowboys.

Most Americans probably don't know what the Alamo was,

much less remember it--

so, an explanation is surely in order:

In the early 19th century, the area now known as Texas

was a part of the Spanish territory of Mexico.

But the desire for independence among the Texas settlers was growing,

and in the 1830's an insurrection against the Mexican governors had begun.

The Mexicans responded forcefully,

and in 1836 a Mexican army under General Santa Anna

laid siege to Texas's most important city,

which in those days was not Dallas, but San Antonio.

Things went badly for the Texans—

only 183 men remained to defend the city,

and they took refuge in a small fort known as the Alamo.

On March 6th of that year, after a fierce and bloody battle,

the Alamo fell with the slaughter of every man,

including that "King of the Wild Frontier," Davy Crockett.

It was a crushing blow for the hopes of independence . . .

or so it seemed.

The Texans under Sam Houston later recovered and repelled the Mexicans,

but it was, in a sense, their defeat at the Alamo  
 that actually turned the tide in their favor,  
 for it was there that the Texans demonstrated their courage and determination  
 to fight for their independence, even to the death.

Hence, the battle cry--"Remember the Alamo!"--  
 a cry that gave them a new will to win.

And you can understand its power.

It was not simply a call to conjure up a recollection of a certain historical event;  
 it was a call to share the bravery and sheer strength of will  
 of the men who died there.

It was a call to make that memory of the past  
 a driving force in the present.

"Remember the Alamo!" they cried  
 and in Texas, I'm told, they still do.

As we move to our biblical text this morning  
 we shall find that the Israelites, too,  
 were given slogans, mottos, and battle cries.

As they stood on the eastern side of the Jordan River,  
 poised to do battle for the promised land after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness,  
 Moses gave the people of God their final instructions--  
 Remember the Exodus, he said.  
 Remember the wilderness, he said  
 And most of all,  
 Remember the Lord your God.

As the people stood with their slavery in Egypt  
 and the harsh desert wilderness wanderings now lying in the past  
 and the future prosperity of the promised land just ahead,  
 Moses sets two imperatives before them--  
 I. First, Remember how the Lord your God taught you  
 in the bad times (vv. 2-5).  
 II. So that, second, you do not forget the Lord your God  
 when times are good (vv. 6-18).

Whether in bad times, or good, the Lord is the same--  
 he is the God of the Covenant,  
 who had made gracious promises to his people,  
 and he is good—all the time.

"**Remember the Lord your God**," Moses says.  
 not out of nostalgia for the past,  
 but out of a desire to love and serve him today.

Let's look now at Deut. 8 with this theme in view.

---

There is a fundamental premise in all that Moses says to these people  
as they were about to receive the gift of land  
that the Lord had promised to give them--  
that is, that the Lord loved Israel--  
He chose her from among the nations of the world  
as a people for his own possession--  
and certainly not because of her physical greatness  
nor because of her moral goodness--  
far from it!

The Lord chose Israel solely out of his free grace  
to be an instrument of his glory to the world  
(we'll talk more about that when we get to chap. 9).

The Lord loved Israel----  
He heard their cries as they labored in pain as slaves in Egypt.  
The Lord had instructed Moses to say to the Pharaoh,  
**'This is what the LORD says:**  
**Israel is my firstborn son,**  
**... "Let my son go, so he may worship me" (Ex. 4:22,23).**

But only after ten deadly plagues would Pharaoh do so.  
And by his mighty hand, the Lord gave birth to his people,  
bringing them out of Egypt  
and through the waters of the Red Sea.  
They had a new life--it was a time of celebration, of joy.  
The Lord loved Israel as a father loves his own son.  
They were sure of it.

But that assurance didn't last long.  
Almost immediately, they began to grumble and complain,  
and they failed to respond to the Lord's love in humble obedience

As a result,  
the Lord demonstrated his fatherly love in a quite unexpected way--  
He led them "**through the vast and dreadful desert,**  
**that thirsty and waterless land,**  
**with its venomous snakes and scorpions" (v. 15).**

For forty years the people had to survive in a hostile environment--  
struggling as wandering nomads with no place to call home.

These were bad times, make no mistake about it--  
but it is here that Moses begins in our passage--  
for in those bad times,  
the Lord was working out his good purpose for his people.

v. 2--"**Remember how the Lord your God led you**  
**all the way in the desert these forty years,**

**to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart,  
whether or not you would keep his commands."**

It was "**to humble you, and to test you to know what was in your heart."**

There is no doubt that wandering in the desert would be a humbling experience.  
All the physical comforts of life would be stripped away.

The people would be forced into a totally alien environment  
with harsh trials before them--

and the question was,

In those trying circumstances,

would they turn toward God or against him?

Would they trust in his faithfulness?

The utter severity of the wilderness would undermine the faith  
of those whose trust in God was based solely  
on his satisfaction of their immediate needs.

Those who loved and obeyed God only in the comfort of their own houses,  
when there was plenty of food on the table,  
and all was right with the world,  
would soon have the shallowness of their faith shown for what it was.

The desert would demand something deeper--  
a faith rooted and grounded in God himself  
rather than simply in his gifts. /

So it is, generally, that a wilderness experience—time in the desert--  
either makes or breaks a person.

It provides the ultimate test of one's character,  
and this, I suppose, is part of the attraction, for those crazy souls  
who sail across the Atlantic in a 10' sailboat,  
or who climb Mt. Everest,  
or who trek to the South Pole.

For those who meet the challenge, it no doubt has a refining effect,  
providing new strength of will and character—a new self-assurance.

But, the new strength provided by the wilderness for the Israelites,  
would not be the strength of self-sufficiency;  
the Israelites would learn the strength  
that comes from a knowledge of the living God.

This was God's purpose.

He sent his people into the wilderness for a refining work  
that took 40 years to complete.

He saw them through it—

he didn't give them more than they could endure.

He fed them with manna—

He brought water out of hard rock,

Their clothes did not wear out  
and their feet did not swell during those forty years.

Even in those hard times, the Lord was faithful to them.

He was testing them,  
for their ultimate benefit—  
as he says in v. 16—

**"so that in the end, things would go well for them."**

The Israelites, Moses says, must never forget what they learned.

The Lord wanted to wean his people away from self-sufficiency  
and to teach them a God-dependency.

He wanted them to know that there was more to life than material comfort.

Our life consists of more than the bread that fills our stomachs.

First and foremost we are to long for that word of God  
that fills our souls.

In those days, the Israelites were made dependent on him--

through his manna which appeared miraculously from the ground  
and through his word which was equally revealed by his grace—

his word, which is the source of divine life.

v. 3-- **"He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna,  
which neither you nor your fathers had known,  
to teach you that man does not live by bread alone,  
but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."**

Our supreme source of life is God himself--

It is by his will that we exist,

and it is by his word that we are sustained.

God in his grace gives us our very lives,

and we must seek him and his Kingdom first,

for our life consists of more than food and clothing.

We are by nature spiritual creatures--

comprised of body and soul.

Filling our bellies will never satisfy the deep hunger of our hearts.

We are designed to live in a relationship with the God who created us--

**"man does not live by bread alone,**

**but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."**

You will recall that these same words were quoted by the Lord Jesus

in his own wilderness experience when he battled the temptations of Satan.

After his baptism, at which the voice from heaven

declared him to be God's beloved Son,

he, too, was led by the Spirit into the desert.

He fasted for 40 days and was he hungry,

but he would not be tempted to turn stones into bread,

to crave what his Father had not given him.  
He would wait for his Father to provide for his needs.

He would feed on every word that comes from the mouth of his Father.  
Jesus, too, learned obedience through the things that he suffered.

v. 5--"Know then in your hearts that as a man disciplines his son,  
so the Lord your God disciplines you."

The Lord could have taken the Israelites from Egypt  
and delivered them immediately to the promised land.  
But that was not his purpose,  
for the Lord desires a people that will demonstrate his holiness  
before the nations of the world;  
He desires children that will display the family likeness--  
thus, the Lord disciplines, he trains, those he loves--  
and so he did during those forty years in the wilderness.

Moses' first point to his people, then,  
**Remember how the Lord your God taught you in the bad times  
in that desert wilderness.**

---

And what about us?  
How are we to apply this?

**To begin with, we must expect to have a wilderness experience;**  
we must expect to be tested, and to be disciplined.  
For God has a good purpose for us, too,  
before we are transported to heavenly glory.  
He desires to see us transformed--each one of us--  
into the image of his Son Jesus Christ.  
And to do this he must train us like the children that we are--  
and this training may at times involve the painful process  
of discipline in the desert.

On this we have no better words than those of Heb. 12:7-11—

**"Endure hardship as discipline;  
God is treating you as sons.  
For what son is not disciplined by his father?  
If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline),  
then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.  
Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us  
and we respected them for it.  
How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!  
Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best;  
but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.  
No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.  
Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace  
for those who have been trained by it."**

We must not despise God's discipline, which is for our good.

It was a 17th Century Scottish Puritan who was reputed to have said--

"Whenever I find myself in the cellar of affliction,  
I look around for the wine."

I like that!

How do you respond to adversity in your life?

Trials and tragedy are the tests of one's faith.

Our suffering, though ultimately the result of evil,  
can be used by God for our good.

But notice I say, "can be used by God for our good"—  
for suffering doesn't always have a positive effect.

British Pastor David Watson spoke about this in his book *Fear No Evil*,  
which was written during the last year of his life  
as he was fighting a losing battle against cancer--

"Two fathers came to see me within a space of a few months.  
Each had lost a young child tragically.

One child, aged four, had died of leukemia;  
the other, aged five, had been drowned in a swimming pool  
in their own back garden.

One father had been a professing Christian before the disaster  
but became a bitter and militant atheist as a result;  
the other had been a professing humanist  
but became a committed Christian as a result.

They both had roughly the same suffering to contend with,  
but their reactions were widely different.

One had his bitterness to endure as well as his suffering,  
which in the long run might well have been worse—  
it was certainly worse for other people;

the other found the peace and love of Christ,  
which transformed his suffering.

In all our afflictions, it is not so much our situation that counts  
but the way in which we react to it.

And our reactions can affect, to a remarkable degree, the outcome of our lives."

Suffering colors life, they say—  
but we choose the colors.

Or as someone has said,

"It is not enough to want to be a useful tool for God:  
You must also be willing to sit still for the grinding that produces the edge."

This is why this passage is so important—

Do you have a view of life that can find meaning in the suffering

that you will inevitably encounter?

The Apostle Paul did—  
Phil. 4:11-13—

**"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.  
I know what it is to be in need,  
and I know what it is to have plenty.  
I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,  
whether well fed or hungry,  
whether living in plenty or in want.  
I can do all this through him whom who gives me strength."**

The Lord will humble you, you can be sure of it—  
and when he does,  
will you receive that discipline as coming from a gracious hand—  
for he is testing you "**so that in the end it might go well with you.**"

The Bible tells us that our Lord has much to teach us--  
and he will often use the bad times to temper our souls,  
to refine us so that we will emerge with the beauty of pure gold.

The Heidelberg Catechism, in answering the question,  
"What does it mean to believe in God . . . ?" (question 26), says this:  
"I trust him so much  
that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need  
for body and soul,  
and he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world.  
He is able to do this because he is almighty God;  
he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father."

**We can expect our time in the wilderness,  
and we must look to the Lord as he uses that time for our good.**

---

But our passage tells us that we must also remember the lessons that God has taught us  
in our own wilderness experiences--  
in those times when we have been forced to give up the props  
on which we usually depend and turn to God alone--  
in those times when we have seen God himself and his word to us  
as a true source of life--  
as necessary and vital as our daily bread—  
in fact, more so.

You must remember what you learned  
that time when your son or daughter was sick or injured  
and you drew near to God in prayer with all your heart.

You must remember what you learned  
that time when the Lord's presence was felt in a special way  
at the death of a friend or a loved one.

You must remember what you learned  
 that time when God's word gave you special encouragement  
 in a moment of despair.

Some people use a journal to record their dealings with the Lord,  
 so they can look back on them--and remember.  
 I've done this from time to time—  
 and I look back on those times and try to remember  
 how the Lord worked graciously through the pain.

These lessons taught in our own wilderness experiences must not be forgotten—  
 we must call them to mind,  
 we must hold on to them.

For only so can we learn obedience through the things we have suffered.

---

We must praise God in the bad times of life  
 so that we will praise him in the good--  
 which is exactly the thought Moses moves to in the rest of this chapter.

**8:7—"For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—  
 a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills;  
 a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees,  
 pomegranates, olive oil and honey;  
 a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing;  
 a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.**

**When you have eaten and are satisfied,  
 praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.  
 Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God,  
 failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees  
 that I am giving you this day.**

**Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied,  
 when you build fine houses and settle down,  
 and when your herds and flocks grow large  
 and your silver and gold increase  
 and all you have is multiplied,  
 then your heart will become proud  
 and you will forget the LORD your God,  
 who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."**

It is almost ironic that the promise of a good land,  
 which had been such a source of strength to the people  
 during their long years in the desert,  
 is also portrayed by Moses as a potential source of temptation.

But it's true—  
prosperity easily leads to pride.  
 For when times are good,

your heart can become proud  
and you will forget the LORD your God and say--  
"My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."

People sometimes say,  
"Anybody can be a Christian when things are going well."  
Certainly there is some truth to that.  
But this passage tells us that there is truth in just the opposite also.  
When things do go well,  
we may face our most difficult test as believers.

Thomas Carlyle, the Scottish writer and historian once declared--  
"Adversity is hard on a man;  
but for one man who can stand prosperity,  
there are a hundred that will stand adversity."

Prosperity can be a deadly trap--  
Our sin is so subtle--the situation Moses describes is so common,  
it hardly needs to be illustrated.

I'm sure we've all had the experience--  
you find yourself in some tight spot and you are driven to your knees--  
"O Lord, if you just get me out of this one,  
I'll be yours forever—  
I'll go to church, I'll go to prayer meeting, I'll teach Sunday School,  
I'll even work in the nursery-- I'll do anything--  
You name it."

But, alas, when the heat is off,  
the steaming passion of our faith fizzles out—  
and how quickly we forget--"Boy that was close.  
Wasn't I clever to make that turn out so well."

We must remember that every good thing we enjoy is a gift from God's hand.

It's not what we deserve,  
any more than the Israelites deserved a land flowing with milk and honey.

Too often we're like that rude child at a birthday party  
who grabs his gifts without ever saying thank you to the givers.

"No," Moses tells the people,  
"don't forget the Lord your God when you go into the promised land,"  
and in v. 14 he begins to list the actions of their God  
to remind them exactly who he was.

1) In v. 14--He was their liberator—  
"do not forget the Lord your God,  
who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

It was he who gave them a freedom from the oppressing authority of Pharaoh

and into a freedom to enjoy the gracious rule of God.  
This was the liberation he brought them.

---

2) In v. 15--He was their **leader**—

**"He led you through the vast and dreadful desert,  
that thirsty and waterless land,  
with its venomous snakes and scorpions."**

It was he who showed them the way by fire at night and cloud by day  
through the perils of the wilderness.  
He directed their paths and led them safely to the promised land.

Remember how he has guided you in the past  
as you look at an uncertain future.

---

3) In vv. 15,16--He was their **provider**—

**"He brought you water out of hard rock.  
He gave you manna to eat in the desert."**

He made them totally dependent on him,  
and then he gave them what they needed.

---

4) Then in v. 18--He was their **enabler**--

**"It is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth."**

"Do you think that just because the food on your table is the result  
of the work of your hands  
that it is not also the work of mine?" he asks.

Oh sure, you worked hard to get that degree  
which enabled you to get that good job,  
which enabled you to get that house and car  
and all the rest.

But who created you in the first place?

Who put you into this world at this time and in this place?

Who provided you with capabilities to take advantage of  
the many opportunities he put before you?

I'm sorry, but no one is ever **self-made**.

There is no good thing that does not come from the hand of the Lord.

When you enter into the promised land, Moses says,  
be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God--

He is your liberator

He is your leader

He is your provider

He is your enabler

Remember the Lord your God.

---

But you may say, it's not fair--those people lived at a time  
when God displayed himself in a particularly powerful way.

I mean, really—  
Some of the oldest there had seen the ten plagues,  
the parting of the Red Sea,  
and the defeat of Pharaoh's army  
with their own eyes!--

And all had drunk of the water from the rock  
and eaten the manna from heaven.  
They had so much more to remember than we do.

Or did they?

Sure, they could remember God as their liberator  
from the bondage of Egypt--  
but we can look back and see Jesus Christ on the cross—  
Jesus, our Savior, bearing our sin and liberating us  
from the spiritual bondage of guilt and shame  
into a new freedom of the Spirit.

Sure, the Lord led them through the wilderness  
to the promised land,  
but could they had very little conception of the true promised land—  
They knew nothing of Jesus raised from the dead,  
ascended into glory,  
who has gone ahead to prepare a place for us.

Sure, God provided them with water and manna--  
but Jesus comes to give us himself—  
the living water and true bread from heaven,  
which satisfies our souls far more fully than anything the Israelites enjoyed.

And sure, they knew God as their enabler to produce material wealth,  
but we can know Jesus as the One who sends the Spirit to dwell within us,  
making us new creatures--  
empowering us to live a new life,  
and blessing us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

No, in Christ we have much to remember.  
We dare not forget the Lord our God--  
who has so clearly revealed himself in Christ.

---

Moses closes this chapter in vv. 19-20 with a strong warning—

**"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.  
Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you,  
so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God."**

Do you see the downward spiral here—  
forgetting the Lord (vv. 2,11),  
leads to ingratitude (vv. 12-16),  
which leads to self-sufficiency and pride (v. 17),  
which leads to idolatry (v. 19),  
which leads to disobedience (v. 20),  
which leads to destruction.

Forgetting leads to death;  
remembering leads to life.

The act of remembering in the Bible, as we said at the beginning,  
is not just the recollection of facts.  
It means bringing something to the forefront of our minds—  
letting that memory influence our behavior  
and guide our decisions.

Remembering in that sense is another name for faith—  
Faith is not mindless.  
Faith is a concentration of the mind on what you know to be true—  
even when your emotions are telling you otherwise.  
Faith is remembering the Lord.

**Remember the Lord your God**, Moses says.  
Focus your minds on him--  
his righteousness, his power, his faithfulness, his love—  
and live your lives accordingly.

Remember who he is and what he has done.

We need to remember that the God who rules the universe is our Father--  
a Father who loves us as his own children,  
and who is working all things for our good.

We need to remember that Jesus Christ has come among us—  
in all his grace and truth—  
he has come to call sinners like you and me to himself.

We need to remember that God's Spirit now lives in us—  
he joins us to Christ—we are united to him in a bond that nothing can break;  
we are now adopted into God's family  
and we are now joined to one another in the body of Christ.

We need to remember these precious truths of the gospel,  
for we so easily forget.

We live in a secular age—

a disenchanting world.

In our culture at large, God is simply not an issue—  
All that matters is human flourishing understood in very mundane categories—  
material comfort, family life, friendships, career success, entertainment—  
this is what life is all about.

Why bother with God?

For many in our culture,  
the notion that there is a God who is actually involved in this world  
is just implausible, if not unimaginable.

The places we work,  
the places we shop,  
the things we watch on our various screens—  
they all conspire to get you to forget about God.  
And unless you consciously and deliberately determine to fight it, you will.

That's why we need, as never before, to encourage one another to remember—  
to remember the God of the gospel--  
--as we gather together on Sundays—under the word of God.  
--as we share regularly in the Lord's Supper,  
and there remember the cross,  
for Jesus said, "**Do this in remembrance of me**"  
--as we fellowship with one another in Community Groups  
and just informally during the week—  
we need to encourage one another to remember the Lord--  
and let that memory live within us.

And individually, may we meet with him daily—  
through his Word, calling to mind what he has taught us  
in the midst of hardship  
so that we may praise him when he brings us into prosperity.

**"Remember the Lord"**--it's a duty and may it be our delight.

**"Remember the Lord"**--may that be **our** battle cry  
as we fight the good fight of faith.

---

Prayer--

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be.  
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee:  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love:  
Here's my heart, O take and seal,

Seal it for Thy courts above.

Closing Song: *Crown Him With Many Crowns*

Benediction:

Num. 6:24 ` "The LORD bless you and keep you;  
the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." '

Living as God's Covenant People  
Studies in Deut. 1-11, #6  
July 23, 2017

## "Remembering of the Covenant" Deuteronomy 8

As the people stood with the slavery of Egypt and the harsh desert wilderness now lying in the past and the future prosperity of the promised land just ahead, Moses sets two imperatives before them, and us--

I. **Remember** how the Lord your God taught you  
in the bad times (vv. 2-5).

May God's provision generates praise.

II. So that you do not **forget** the Lord your God  
when times are good (vv. 6-18).

Don't let God's prosperity generate pride.

*"Remember the Lord your God!"*

**Sermon Discussion:**

**"Remembering of the Covenant"  
Deuteronomy 8**

- What are some lessons that you have learned during the some hard times that you want to remember?
- How can prosperity be more dangerous to your spiritual health than adversity? Have you ever experienced that? How can you protect yourself from that danger?
- What is the force of the command "to remember the Lord"? What are different ways that can we do that? What can help you during the day to "remember the Lord"?
- Take some time in your group "remembering the Lord." Talk and then turn those reflections into prayer.