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Sermon Series: *Not Business as Usual, No. 5*

Remember the Lord

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Deuteronomy 8:10-18

Leading up to this Memorial Day weekend where we, as a people, remember and honor those who died in service to our nation, I've been thinking a lot about memory and remembering.

It strikes me that this ability we have, this ability to remember, when you think about it, is a pretty remarkable thing! To think that God made us to have what amounts to a filing cabinet – or you might think of it as a really big jump drive – right up here in our heads. We carry it around with us all the time, loaded with all this data – this stuff we've learned and know, stuff we've read and seen, stuff we've lived and experienced.

And when we need it, or want it, we can just do a quick search through the files and pull it out.

Well, to some degree, right?

There are things that hinder our ability to remember – things that mostly come with age or sickness. That's all a result of the fall, clear back in Eden – the deterioration of our bodies and minds. It's like the files get corrupted or the drawers get stuck – they won't open anymore. That happens to nearly all of us, to one degree or another.

And it happens at different times – and it's inconsistent, isn't it?

There are times I can see someone's face in my mind, but I cannot remember their name. And vice-versa.

There are times I can remember minute details of complex things, and at the same time, I can't remember where I left my keys.

There are times that some memory of a line from a book or a song or a movie or something will just hit me – totally unexpected. I wake up in the middle of the night with this memory – completely out of the blue.

Those middle of the night remembrances, those can be strange, and at times they've caused me to turn over and say to, um, Annette is her name...

It hasn't gotten that bad – yet.

But seriously, memory, the ability to remember, even in our fallen state, is truly amazing – and human memory *before* the fall must have been just spectacular! And the reality of it should point us toward God.

It's funny how it varies, though.

I mean, some things we simply can't remember at times, even when we want to.

Some things we remember for no reason.

Some things we remember precisely when we want to.

Some things we are asked to remember – like Memorial Day, you know? Other holidays. Observances. We're asked to remember these, so proper honor and respect can be paid where it's due.

Some things we are asked to remember.

And then – there are some things in life that we are *told* to remember.

In order to pass a test in school, or to graduate from school, we are told to remember certain things.

In order to drive a car, we are told to remember certain things.

In order to go into a store these days, we are told to remember certain things: to wear these [hold up mask], to walk according to the arrows on the floor, and to, you know, use good hygiene – don't spit on people and what not.

Some of those things are easier to remember than others.

But like it or not, there are some things we are told to remember.

Sometimes, it's God Himself who tells us to do that.

It's true. God speaks very plainly in Scripture about certain things that His people must remember.

And you know, it's a very good exercise for us to find those places. I'd encourage you to do a search through the Bible and make a list of the *things*, the *facts* that God *tells* us to keep in mind – or, to remember.

If you'll do that, you'll wind up with a very encouraging list of truths that speak of God's character and goodness and love and protection of His people – because, you see, *all that God tells us to remember is for our own good.*

God tells us to remember things, not just for some academic exercise or to pass some test, but for the sake of our own wholeness and maturity – for success in life, and for our peace of mind and heart and spirit – for now and forever.

And, of course, that list of things God tells us to remember would not be complete without that which we find in Deuteronomy, Chapter 8.

I'll read it in a minute – Deuteronomy 8, but before I do, let me just remind us of the context of what was happening in Israel's national life.

Deuteronomy 8 comes just after one of the most "*not-business-as-usual*" times ever for Israel: their time in the wilderness

, after their escape from Egypt.

Of course, they'd fled *to* Egypt as just one, big family – the famil+++y of Jacob – during a tremendous famine, and they flourished and grew while they were there. For hundreds of years they were there, and they grew into a great nation of people, but during that time they went from being Egypt's honored guests to Egypt's slaves.

The Egyptians enslaved the Jews, and in their slavery, Scripture says, they cried out to God for help.

And God heard them, and they trusted God to lead them out of Egypt – out of their slavery.

It's funny, isn't it, how ready we become to trust God when times are really hard?

Well, times were hard for Israel, and so they trusted God – and this fellow, Moses, who was leading them. They

trusted God enough to *get them out*. And, of course, He did that in absolutely miraculous ways.

And because they trusted Him to *bring them out*, God wanted them to trust Him further. He wanted them to trust Him all the way to *taking them in*—into the land He had promised them generations before.

And, you'd *think* they *would* trust Him to do that, wouldn't you? I think *God* thought—may I even say God *hoped*—that they would trust Him, not just to bring them *out*, but also to take them *in*?

It doesn't seem that it was really God's intention for His people to "wander in the desert" for the 40 years that they did. It seems His plan was to move them *out of Egypt* and then, rather quickly, *into their permanent home*—that is, their permanent *earthly* home, anyway.

And hadn't God proven Himself capable of doing it?

I mean, here God had bought them out from under the greatest nation—the greatest military—on earth at the time. He did amazing miracles right before their very eyes. He fought for them. He provided for them. He fed them. He clothed them. He gave them the Law, which was the secret of living successfully in their world with Him. He gave them every advantage.

And what did they do? They began to whine—like a spoiled kid.

"We're thirsty, where's the water? We don't like this food—we want meat to eat! Where's the beef?"

And then, "This is so bland! Where's the spices? Oh, we should have stayed in Egypt!"

But even in their short-sighted whining and complaining, God continues to provide for them. And then, as the climax to this chapter of their lives, He shows them the magnificence of the land He promised to them, and He tells them, "It's yours for the taking. Go and claim it!"

But because the people in the land were big and powerful by earthly standards—giants, some reported them to be, the people would not do as God said to do.

In the moment they needed to the most, they failed to remember all that God had done—all the ways He'd shown them His love and power. They failed to *remember* Him—so all they could see in that moment was the threat. And so, they fell into *fear*—fear of the so called "giants" of the land of Canaan.

And that fear led to *doubt*—it overcame their trust in God and what He could do.

And that doubt led to *disobedience*; they refused to do as God asked them to do—to follow God's way.

And then that disobedience actually led to *violence*. Violence against their leaders, Moses and Aaron—those who represented God's way to them. The people threatened to stone them.

And so, the Lord intervened at that point and sent a plague upon those who had seen the goodness of the land but provoked fear in the nation—He killed them all.

And that actually seemed to wake up the nation; it's sad that that's what it takes sometimes, but that's the way it often works.

They realized they'd sinned against God by not *remembering* and so falling into *fear* and *doubt* and *disobedience* and even *violence*, but then their answer to that was even worse. Their answer to that then became *presumption*.

When He saw they were unwilling to follow Him into the land, God told them, "OK then, opportunity missed—you're not ready. Time to turn back."

But they didn't listen to Him again. Now they said, "No, we'll take the land!" Which, of course, resulted in, not only their immediate failure and the beating down of their armies, but also in the certainty of their extended time in the wilderness: 40 years—one year for every day the recon team witnessed, and yet misrepresented to the people, the goodness of God's promise. It was just enough time for the generation of those who doubted God to die without entering in.

What a tragedy—an immense, national tragedy—their failure to remember caused, you see?

But now it's forty years later, and a new generation stands at the threshold of God's promise. And this time, in this moment, they're ready. They've had forty years of, let's say, training, experience, and faith built up in them. They're not going to forget all that God had done for them and taught them—how He's proven Himself to them through these years.

They were going to remember and so be strong and courageous and faith-filled and obedient. And they did and they were.

But you know, God knew their hearts—just as He knows ours—and the tremendous human potential to forget Him, and to become fearful and proud, to doubt Him and disobey Him. And He knows all the violence and chaos and presumption that can cause.

So, through Moses, God spoke to them on this, the threshold of their destiny. As they stood in the doorway of their future, He said to them these words of Deuteronomy 8:

¹⁰ *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. ¹¹Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, laws and decrees that I am giving you this day.*

¹² *Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied—¹⁴ 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.*

¹⁵ *He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.*

¹⁷ *You may well say to yourself, "It's my power and the strength of my hands that has produced this wealth for me."*

¹⁸ *But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, even as it is today." (NIV)*

The power of remembering, you see? It's not just a nice thing to do. It's critical to human survival.

Remembering God—His character, His power, His wisdom, His provision.

He wants us to remember Him. He calls His people to intentionally remember Him.

Why, because He has an ego problem? Because He has to be the center of attention?

No, because He wants the very best for us, and since He created our world and everything in it, He knows what that best really is—He knows what it looks like and how to get it.

And He wants to show all of that to us—in order to lead us into His destiny for us.

But He also knows our propensity to forget Him—to forget who He is, what He’s done.

He knows how much like Israel we can be, because we’re people—people the Spirit is working with—working on.

But just the same, we are people who are tempted day by day, by the enemy of our souls, to forget Him.

Our world does nothing to help us remember to remember God. In fact, nearly everything around us is pushing us away from Him.

The overwhelming message of our world is to believe in ourselves—to trust our own wisdom and power and knowledge and creativity to get things done.

And when things do get done, we’re so quick to think and to say, “We made this!” “We made this life—this money—this opportunity—this prosperity—this nation—this world!”

“We fought this fight. We won this victory! We defeated this enemy. We survived this tragedy by our own wit and power.”

How much have you heard that, just in these last couple of months?

We’ve forgotten how God has made us and shaped our civilization—our principles and laws and sense of order and morality.

In all of our misplaced pride and unfounded arrogance, we forget Him.

And when difficult things come, we are shocked to find that we’re not nearly as powerful as we thought we were—and we give in to fear.

And fear gives way to doubt.

And doubt leads to disobeying God—to wandering far from Him.

And disobedience leads to violence. We wind up hurting each other and ourselves because we’re so full of ourselves—and so far away from how He made us to live.

And we fall into presumption. We’ll do it our way—we’ll trust in our own opinions, our own truths. We’ll take charge.

And frankly, when we insist upon doing that, sometimes, in His grace, God lets us wander for a while—until we get over ourselves and realize again how much we

need Him. He’s always nearby. And honestly, He keeps protecting us, even when we’re not aware of it.

But in those wilderness times, He longs for us to humble ourselves and call on Him, to give in to His will, to let ourselves be broken before Him and declare, not our independence, but our utter dependence—upon Him.

That’s what it really means to remember Him.

You see, remembering isn’t really just something that happens up here. Real remembering is something that happens in here—and it changes our hearts.

It’s not cerebral. It’s spiritual—theological—transformational—a work of the soul.

And just as the best thing Israel could do in their not-business-as-usual time in the wilderness was to really, truly remember God, so is that the best thing that our nation—our world—could do in these wilderness days and weeks and months that we’ve experienced.

The healing that we need—that’s never going to come from our asserting our independence. It’s not going to come from a godless government. It’s not going to come, frankly, from any vaccine. There’s no Pharaoh alive that can fix what ails us.

The only One that can stop the presumption and violence and disobedience and doubt and fear is the God who made us.

And He’s listening for our call. But before we can call to Him—we have to remember.

Whatever your circumstance today, friends—in your prosperity and wealth, in your sorrow and pain, in self-assurance or fear, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in health and in sickness—whatever you do, don’t forget the Lord your God.

Remember what He’s done in days past, so we have the courage and confidence to follow Him in the days to come.

Would you pray with me?

Lord, would You forgive us for the mess that our world is in, and even in the midst of it, would You reveal Yourself to us? Would You bring us to the bottom of ourselves, so that we might be able to reach out to You and say, “O, God, You are God; we are not. You know everything, and we really know nothing. You are the One who has all the potential and all the power to deliver us from ourselves, to deliver us from our pride, to deliver us from this virus and all of the chaos, all of the hurt, and all of the violence that it is causing in this world.”

Lord, would You hear the prayers of your Church, and would You help Your church to pray, maybe as we never have before, because we remember Who You are, really, and remembering Who You are, means that we remember who we are not. Lord, help us and save us. In Your name we pray, Jesus.

Amen.

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