

The First Sunday of Lent

February 14, 2016

Prayer of the Day: O God, Father of the faithful, you led your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide now the people of your church, that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: It is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." (Matthew 4:10)

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 26:5-10

Do you know your family's history—where they came from, what jobs they held, where they lived? For a fee, you can scour through birth certificates, old censuses, and passports on websites like Ancestry.com and Genealogy.com. One company even offers to determine the exact region of the world from which you originated simply by checking your DNA.

Is there any value, any reason, any point to knowing your family's history? Some people sift through records in order to get the right facts about a family story. Others wish to rediscover the lasting impact of a certain relative. Still others retrace the steps an ancestor made in leaving the old world and arriving to the new world. Even though some may have no desire to know what happened centuries ago, most at least treasure the life-history of their parents and grandparents. Digging into your family history leads to a deeper appreciation of what your family accomplished and how those accomplishments leave a lasting impact on your present-day life.

So, is there any value in remembering what God has done for you? Jesus' birth, the temptations he faced, his suffering— it all happened thousands of years ago. Why is this retold so often?

As someone connected to God through faith, you see how Jesus' wilderness victory still impacts your life today. **REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD!** *who rescues you from oppression, who fuels your thanksgiving.*

Deuteronomy 26:5-10

⁵ Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. ⁶ But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. ⁷ Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ⁸ 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. ⁹ He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; ¹⁰ and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him.

Moses urges the nation of Israel to do just that— **REMEMBER THE LORD THEIR GOD!** They had marched hundreds of miles through a desert and spent decades just to reach this point. They now stand at the Jordan River, the eastern border of modern day Israel. Just west of that River sat land— not just any old land, but the land God promised to give to them.

Moses would not enter this new land with Israel; his earthly life was reaching its end. So, Moses preaches his final sermon. He urges the nation to remember everything God has done for them. **Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous.”** If Israel remembered their family history, they would come across Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. He lived in Aram for some time. Then he moved down to Egypt with his family of 70 people. While there, God took that number and grew the nation of Israel to over 2 million people!

But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Jacob’s descendants did not live in Egypt, working the land like hired hands. They were physically pulled out of their homes, forced into submission under slave-drivers. Each day dragged on, pounding out bricks, constructing cities, working long days, returning home without a paycheck, without any sense of pride in a job well done ([Exodus 1:11,14](#); [5:6-19](#)). Bodies ached; cuts slowly healed; whips cracked across their backs if they slowed down. What did Israel have to look forward to? The evil raging all around them was like trying to escape a hole filled with quicksand, that try as they might, they would never escape!

Talk about feeling stuck in sheer hopelessness! You have probably never suffered under the draining effects of forced slavery. Yet, God tells us that the evil we have done submits us to the eternal slavish chains of hell. God has laid out his crystal-clear expectations for you. To never questing his loving care. To never twist his promises into things he does not say. To devote all your love, your every thought to him— and to him only! To fail doing this— to accuse him of hurting you, to feel that God’s expectations do not apply to you, to embrace money or family or activities more than God— failure submits us to eternal death.

Scrubbing a guilty heart clean with good works does nothing. Trying to appease God with money and kind words does not remove those chains. Attempting to simply ignore a burning conscience does not free you from eternal death in hell. Failure to meet God’s expectations forces you to submit to the deadly, inescapable consequences of sin.

REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD! *who rescues you from oppression.* When Israel felt forever stuck in slavery, [...] **the LORD heard our voice and 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.** God’s strong hand created ten plagues; his outstretched arm spread them across Egypt. Water became red, iron-tasting blood. Frogs, flies, gnats, locusts filtered in through every crack and crevice, blanketing the region. Blistering boils broke out; the sun darkened; hail from the sky pummeled crops. The angel of the LORD passed over Israel, taking the life of every

firstborn, but sparing life where the blood of the Passover lamb was smeared over the door. Each terrifying sign and wonder compelled pharaoh to free God's people.

Why remember any of this? These events happened 50 years earlier! Most of those standing at the Jordan River either were too young to remember slavery or were not born yet! Why remember what their ancestors endured? Because the mercy God had in releasing Israel from Egypt is the same mercy he demonstrates today!

Because love begins with God, he sent Jesus Christ into your world. For the next 33-years of his life, Jesus walked on this earth, facing your temptations. The devil tempts him to challenge God's care. He tempts Jesus to twist and exaggerate God's promises. He pulls at Jesus to worship someone other than God. If Jesus had just said: "Yes" or knelt down in worship, the hell's deadly chains would have been slapped on him.

Yet, Jesus held up the shield of God's Word, striking down each flaming temptation. He meets God's expectations so that by his death he might destroy slavery to hell. When Jesus rises Easter morning, he does so, declaring your freedom from hell. He brings you into the winner's circle so that you may be crowned with the gift of eternal life! **REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD** *who rescues you from oppression.*

REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD *who fuels your thanksgiving.* Life would soon change. For the past forty years Israel opened their eyes each morning to the ceiling of their tent. They repeatedly packed up their possessions, rolled up their tents, and herded their animals to a new location, then let the animals graze, put up their tent, and unloaded their possessions. Soon they would no longer live out of a box; they could build permanent brick houses! Instead of daydreaming about what this new land might offer, they would see it, feel it, live in pure satisfaction of God's fulfilled promise.

[God] brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey... The Mediterranean Sea sits just off to the west, the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Kinnereth in the Old Testament) to the Northeast. Land is fertile for farming. Cattle could graze. Best of all— this land was theirs simply because God gave it to them. In fact, God drove many of the inhabitants out, leaving nothing but free land to snap up. When Israel fought wars, God put the victory in their hands ([Joshua 24:12](#)).

What is the response to this love? **[To] bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given [...]** Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. A "first-fruit" offering is just what the name implies. Israel would bring the first sheaves of grain they harvested ([Leviticus 23:9-14](#)). Yes, the devil would stir up the worry that they were giving God too much or that they could give God whatever was leftover. Yet, God promised the people that he would give even greater blessings to them. So, this firstfruit offering demonstrated that God was first in their hearts. After all, the LORD freed them from captivity; the LORD promised to free them from their sins.

REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD *who fuels your thanksgiving.* The gracious God has lavished you with completely free forgiveness. All this yours without you deserving it; all this yours because God, in his compassion, gives it to you!

You get to journey through another season of Lent. Here you see that only through Jesus you have the concrete confidence that heaven is your home. Only the blood of Jesus removes sin; only the blood of Jesus purifies your heart so that you can stand before God.

While you wait for heaven to become a visible, physical reality, you **REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD** *who fuels your thanksgiving.*

God's love for you motivates your love for God. Just as Israel gave their firstfruit offerings, so you also give the first of your heart. God gives you earthly possessions so that you might have the privilege of returning them to your heavenly Father. Yes, the temptation exists to consider money as stuff you gained by your own hands. Yet, God tells us that he first gave you your possessions—and if anything, your abilities to earn a paycheck.

So, when we set our budgets, remember what we can give our God. It is not that God needs our money. Rather we give because we want to say: "Thank you." One way we say "Thanks" is by giving our offering so that we can share this good news with others. Your offerings help maintain a building in which to worship. Your offerings support a full-time minister to personally apply the good news to you. Your offerings touch locations miles away, helping other congregations establish their own house of worship. Your offerings help create materials to reach out to those who need to hear about this deliverance.

You give your "first-fruit" offering with the same attitude that Israel had. Money can be loved and become an object to worship, to cherish with your heart. Giving our offerings to God breaks the devil's temptation, that is, by giving you demonstrate your love for God and his trust to bless you tremendously.

Not only that, but your giving flows from a heart which loves what God has done for you. So, you give not only an offering, but yourself in worship to God. Continue reserving the first hours of the first day of the week to join your fellow believers and bow down before God.

You come to **REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD**. Not that you forgot who he is, but you remember the spiritual battle you face. The devil's temptations always seek to snatch you from God. Here you see Jesus go to the cross to purify your heart. Here you receive the strength to fight temptation and press on towards heaven. Here you get (what is possibly) the most time in singing, speaking, and praying your thanks to God.

REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD! Just like you may know your family's history— where they came from, what jobs they held, where they lived, remember what God has done for you! Just as he rescued Israel from slavery, he has freed you from eternal slavery. He does not hope to make heaven your home; he has made it yours! All this comes from Jesus, who withstood temptation and delivered you from evil.

REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD with your thanksgiving. Your Savior took of his crown of glory, left his throne in heaven, and submitted himself to death on a cross! He fights the devil to win the unattainable victory. Then he gives you its trophy!

He does not win in order to guilt you into service. Rather, his love for you motivates your love for him. You give to share the good news with others. You give, and by giving, demonstrate the priority God has in your heart.

There is value in remembering what God has done for you. Jesus' birth, the temptations he faced, his suffering, his resurrection—all these happened thousands of years ago, but they currently stand as the only reason you are going to heaven. As someone connected to God through faith, **REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD!** *who rescues you from oppression, who fuels your thanksgiving.*