

Sermon Series: Deuteronomy Lessons

January 26, 2013

## **Title: Remembering**

Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-5

Summary: Each of us has a "preferred outcome" for the things that happen in our lives. The key to attaining the truly preferred outcome is found only in keeping and remembering God's commands.

## **Preferred Outcome**

### **What's yours?**

Preferred outcomes: we all have them. Just about everything we set out to do has what we would think of as a "preferred outcome."

A preferred outcome: it's in the faces of every one of the 70,000 fans at a football game -- even if they are rooting for different teams.

A preferred outcome: we stand at the altar together, exchanging sacred vows in the hope of a long and happy marriage.

A preferred outcome: we tuck our kids into bed at night, praying all of God's richest blessings into their future.

A preferred outcome: we start a new year with hopes that this year will be better, and we ourselves will be better people.

Preferred outcomes. Hopes. Dreams. Daring to imagine what hasn't happened yet.

But how do we turn preferred outcomes into reality?

### **Preferred Outcome defined:**

In the Book of Deuteronomy Moses speaks to the people that he has led through the desert for the past 40 years. His concern is that they achieve the "preferred outcome" that God has for them. He knows that their next decisions will determine whether or not that outcome becomes reality.

Listen to how he describes God's preferred outcome for them:

### **Deuteronomy 8:1 NIV**

**Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.**

*Live:*

All of our hopes for the future depend upon Life. Life, not death or decay. Not just surviving, but thriving, humming with life.

I remember my wife bringing two sprouting acorns back from Lake George one summer. They weren't much to look at when compared to the oak tree from which they had fallen -- just acorns with a green shoot poking through. But they were *alive*. They weren't just "barely" alive. They were fully alive and ready to go. Drive past our yard now and you'll see two oak trees standing tall.

Our preferred outcome always begins with "life." Jesus said: "I have come that you might have life and have it to the full!"

*Increase:*

Living things grow. Just like those oak trees. Just like those kids you carried on your shoulders a few years ago, and who can carry you now. God's first command was all about "increase":

**Genesis 1:28 NIV**

**God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."**

Moses uses the same word in his message to the Israelites: "so that you may live and increase."

*Enter:*

God's preferred outcome for us always takes us somewhere we have never been before. It takes us into new territory, a "new land." The journey may be scary at times, but never dull! And it is only in that new space and new set of circumstances that the preferred outcome can be found.

*Possess:*

But God did not mean for us to be mere tourists in the new land He brings us to. He brings us there to *possess* the new land.

Think about what it's like to break a destructive habit and replace it with a healthy one. We choose to live instead of continuing on a deathly path. We find God's strength to grow into this new venture. We step out, leaving an old set of behaviors behind and trying out new ones. But the journey isn't complete until the new behaviors are a fixed reality in our lives. We need to *possess* the new land God has given to us.

### **Your journey/our journey:**

Take a moment to think about an area in your life where God is challenging you to embrace His "preferred outcome." It may be in your personal life. It may involve your relationships with loved ones or friends. It may be a sense of calling to serve God in a new or renewed way.

Now, think about the 4 steps to realizing that preferred outcome: being alive/increasing/entering/possessing the land.

Where are you on that particular journey?

What challenges does God have for us as a church as He leads us to His preferred outcome for us in the coming year?

## **Remembering**

### **Is God in charge?**

Moses predicates the entire journey into God's preferred outcome for our lives upon one thing:

#### **Deuteronomy 8:1 NIV**

***Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.***

The journey into God's purpose and plan for our lives is a journey in which He alone is in charge. He is the one who created us and our world. He alone knows how it truly works. He alone knows what lies ahead. Our journey depends upon Him and Him alone.

#### **Deuteronomy 4:39-40 NIV**

**Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time.**

**Remember!**

So how do we encounter and learn these life-giving commands? Are they religious rules handed down from on high from a distant deity? Are they ethical principles that exist in some cosmic archive that we are supposed to obey whether we understand them or not? Or are they meant to be woven into the very fiber of our lives?

Moses' next words provide the answer:

### **Deuteronomy 8:2 NIV**

**Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.**

God's commands are an integral part of our life journey. That is why Moses tells the people to *remember* the path God led them on over the past 40 years. A literal translation of the beginning of this verse would read:

**"Remember all the path which the Lord your God caused you to walk these forty years..."**

The secret to the commands was deeply embedded in the path that God had brought them on. And it was in that journey that God humbled and tested them "in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands."

In other words, following God's commands was no mere philosophical or religious exercise. It was not just about paying lip service to a religious tradition. It was the very essence of life itself -- life lived according to the Creator God's instructions.

### **Remembering the Journey:**

A road trip with a GPS illustrates this idea quite nicely. As anyone who has ever used a GPS knows, the GPS literally tells when to make every turn on the journey. The GPS issues the commands; the driver makes the correct turns; the car arrives at its correct, or preferred, destination.

At every command the driver must decide whether to obey the voice behind the screen or not. And when you're half way to your goal you can pull into a rest area and "remember" how your obedience to the GPS' commands -- your humility in action -- has paid off. Every command is a kind of test, if you will, of whether or not the driver will do what the GPS tells him or her to do.

For Moses and his people, God was their GPS, leading through His Holy Spirit in the cloud of His glory, and through the commands that He gave them when He made them His covenant people. The people have come to a rest stop in their long journey to the Promised Land. From this vantage point, Moses instructs them to look back on how far

they've come and how they got here. That means *remembering, reliving, reflecting upon* what happened when they obeyed God's commands, and what happened when they didn't. At each point God was testing them to see if they would obey Him or not.

## **The Father's Journey**

### **The Father's Provision:**

The journey did more than test the willingness of the Israelites to obey God. It also served as a classroom for the most important lesson we ever learn in this life:

### **Deuteronomy 8:3-4 NIV**

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

**Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.**

**Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.**

God allowed the journey to take His people through hard circumstances, circumstances that humbled them by exposing their helplessness and neediness. He let them become hungry and thirsty in the desert. Why? Not as a punishment, but as an opportunity to nourish them in a brand new way! Thus the great lesson that Jesus Himself quoted to Satan when He was tempted to turn stones into bread in the desert:

**"...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."**

Here are those "commands" once again. By choosing to obey God when they were lost, hungry, thirsty and vulnerable (i.e. not in control) they discovered that God had an entirely new way of meeting their needs. Likewise, the harsh conditions of the desert proved no match for the vitality of their bodies under God's protection. Even their clothes outlasted the wear and tear of the desert journey!

Could it be that God might be testing you at this time in your life because He wants to open up His cupboard and serve you the "bread of heaven" instead of the stale leftovers of this world? How would you know unless your own cupboard was running bare? His new food for the journey is only found in obedience to His commands.

### **The Father's Lesson:**

Ultimately, the great lesson of their journey was that they were under the care and instruction of the same Father who had called them out of Egypt:

**Deuteronomy 8:5 NIV**

**Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.**

Every step of the way, in the good times and bad, Israel was in the most privileged position imaginable: she was in the constant care of her Father in Heaven.

And just as we earthly parents do most of our instructing and chastising in the course of our shared journey with our children, in the same way God did His primary teaching right in the middle of the journey where it counted most.

**About that preferred outcome?!**

I remember looking down from the chair lift at a ski instructor teaching an older guy some of the finer points of skiing. It was evidently a private lesson -- one the guy had spent some real money on. Anyway, I saw the man make a turn, skis together, legs and back stiff as a board. The instructor watched the turn, then began to give him some pointers on how to make it better -- something the man had clearly not expected or wanted. Perhaps the man had paid for the lesson so that he could show a ski instructor just how good he was -- a little professional affirmation, for a fee. But it didn't turn out that way. He had learned some bad habits, habits that the "chastisement" of the ski instructor was intended to correct.

Life is not place where we perform or strut our stuff for God or others. It's a classroom, one that happens at home, at work, at school, in the doctor's office, on the interstate and everywhere else life takes us. Each turn in the path is a learning moment. At each turn God speaks -- through His Word, through our friends, through His voice in our hearts and minds, even through our circumstances.

The big question is, are we listening? And are we willing to remember what He said?