



Be Thou My Vision

Behold Our God! – Read the Bible for Life Series #11

Deuteronomy 4

Pastor David Sunday

November 13, 2011

Please keep your Bibles open to Deuteronomy 4. The key word of this morning's message is remember—remember. It's an important word for people who can be forgetful.

Maybe you can identify with this husband and wife. Both were a little hungry and the husband said to his wife, "I'm going to go get something to eat, would you like me to bring you something?" She said, "Yeah, I'd like some ice cream with some chocolate sauce and a glass of milk." As he left, she said, "You better write that down because you'll forget." He assured her, "I'll remember. I won't forget that." She shook her head in disbelief and a little while later he came back with a plate of scrambled eggs, sausage and a glass of milk. She looked at him with disgust and said, "You forgot my toast."

I just couldn't resist sharing that story. It can be embarrassing how forgetful we are. You've known a friend for many years and all of a sudden, you're standing face to face and you can't remember her name. What's happened?

I remember the time I was a young assistant pastor at Grace and my boss, Pastor John Sale, was filling the baptistry in the morning for the evening baptismal service. He said to me, "Would you please go over there around 2:30 and shut the water off in the baptistry." I agreed, went home and took a nap. I woke up around 4:00 and went to my office and was doing a few things to get ready for the evening service. Around 4:45, I remembered that I had forgotten to turn off the water. I went running over there and water had spilled all over the floor of the room and down into the basement of the church. I was so thankful that my pastor, my boss, was a merciful man in light of my forgetfulness that day!

It can be an **embarrassing** thing to forget things that we should remember. It can be **frightening**, too. To be in a dark place at night, far from home and not remember how to get home. To be in an accident and suffer amnesia and you can't remember your history. Or the dread of watching a loved one or you yourself suffering from a disease that steals

your memory, taking away your sense of history. These are grievous experiences that many of you have gone through in one way or another. Losing your memory can be a frightening thing.

It can also be **appalling** when things we should never forget are forgotten, like a nation that forgets the valor and courage of those who have laid down their lives for our freedoms. That's why we have reminders like Veterans Day. That's why we say thank you to those who have served us so well.

When a parent forgets a child in the back seat of a car on a hot summer day and goes into the mall to shop for a couple hours—that's an appalling thing. When a minister forgets his ordination vows and forgets the faith that he once held dear and stops preaching the gospel and the Word of God and stops praying for God's people, that kind of forgetfulness is **shameful**.

That's what Moses is warning the people of Israel against in the book of Deuteronomy, saying, "Don't allow yourself to get spiritual amnesia. Don't forget what God has done for you."

Deuteronomy is a very important book in the Bible. We've been reading it this week as we've gone through the Bible reading plan. In this book, the great commandment—love God with all your heart, soul, might and strength—appears for the first time in the Scriptures. This book was so important that when a king was ascending to the throne in Israel, he was required to write out a copy of this book and then keep it with him all his days during his reign and read from that book of the law daily. This book was loved by our Lord Jesus Christ; He quotes from Deuteronomy more than from any other book. When Satan tempted Him in the wilderness, it was from this book that Jesus drew the spiritual power to resist Satan, quoting from this book three times. The New Testament refers to Deuteronomy more than 50 times; a number that is exceeded only by Psalms and Isaiah.

The storyline of this book is that Moses is an old man, close to 120 years old. He has led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, through the Red Sea and then because of their unbelief, they have wandered in the wilderness forty years. Moses has been with them through those years of wandering. Now that whole generation—except for Joshua and Caleb—has died off. It is the second generation—the children who had come through the Red Sea—who are now poised to enter the Promised Land. Before they go in, Moses is preaching a series of sermons to them, recalling all that God had done for them in their

history and exhorting them to remember—not to forget—the things that God has done. That theme is pronounced in the chapter that we've just read this morning.

Let's look at it in Deuteronomy 4:9. God says through His servant Moses, "*Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children...*"

Then again in verses 23-24: "*Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*"

As you read through the rest of the book of Deuteronomy, be looking for phrases like this:

- Remember.
- Remember the mighty things God has done.
- Do not forget His words.
- Remember who you were.
- Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you.

God uses these statements over and over and over again throughout this book. Don't forget. Don't forget what He has done for you, especially when you become wealthy and prosperous and there are vineyards and you have all kinds of things, do not think that it's because of your might and your wisdom and your power that these things have happened to you. You must remember that it's the Lord your God who has given you this power. "Don't forget Me. Forget Me not." That's the main theme in this book of Deuteronomy.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a Russian thinker, a brilliant man, a writer who was locked up in Siberia in the Gulag for many, many years because he was suspect by the Communist government as being in opposition to them, which he was. Late in his life he was released and spent time writing and speaking in America and other places. One of the things he said toward the end of his life was these words:

"Over half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this is happening.' Since then I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of our revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of testimonies and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today

to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some sixty million people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat, 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.'"

1. We Remember the Things that Really Matter to Us

Now we have two words of instruction to apply to our hearts this morning from this message. First of all, we remember what matters to us. Have you ever noticed that you can't will yourself into forgetting something? In fact, there are certain things you probably wish you could forget and the harder you try to forget, the more likely you are to remember. We remember the things that matter to us.

You remember what you concentrate your attention on and you concentrate your attention on the things that matter most to you. Often the things we forget, we forget because we didn't really care about them enough or we didn't take the time to concentrate our attention on them. Forgetfulness is often a sign of indifference or neglect which is why it hurts when someone who is close to you forgets something that is important to you. That's why it's usually not funny when a husband forgets his anniversary. That forgetfulness communicates indifference.

Moses has been reminding the people in chapters one through three of the mighty things God has done for them in their history and of who God is. He's saying, "If this God matters to you, you will take care, lest you forget Him." Specifically in this chapter, he points to the **words of God** and the **works of God** as things that God's people must be careful never to forget.

Let's look at **the words of God** in verses one through 14. In verse two, God is a God who speaks to us and His word is perfect and sufficient so we shall not add to the Word nor take from it but rather keep the commandments. In verses three and four, we see there are consequences attached to our obedience to God's Word. Moses recalls a recent incident in their history that we read in the book of Numbers about how they had disobeyed God's Word and turned to idols and how God had disciplined them.

Moses motivates them to keep the Word of God by reminding them of how it will make them a unique and attractive people in the sight of all the nations. When

people see Israel's obedience to the Word of God, he says in verse six, *"that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'"* Their lives are different. They have a knowledge. They have a wisdom that we can't find anywhere else. Remember the Queen of Sheba coming from afar to see Solomon because of his wisdom? Because of this law.

Verse seven: *"For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?"* He's a God who is near. He is near because He speaks in a way we can understand and know Him.

Verse eight: *"And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?"* This is a treasured Word. This is something to value and esteem and love and cherish and obey. In light of what this Word is and the uniqueness that it brings to God's people, we must, according to verse nine, "...take care, and keep our souls diligently, lest we forget..." We must make known God's Word to our children and to our children's children. We need to teach the Word of God. We need to be disciplined in instruction of God's Word because if God matters to us, we will value His Word. That's how our God speaks to us. He's a speaking God.

Moses says in verses eleven and following, it's not through images or idols that God appears, it's through His voice. Verse 12: *"You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice."* So if you love this God, if He matters to you, you will treasure His Word, His decrees and His laws.

Then Moses also focuses on **the works of God**. His Words and His works.

2. We Remind Ourselves of that which We Dare Not Forget

If we value this God, we will remember the mighty works that He has accomplished on our behalf. Verse 32: *"For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of."*

Then Moses begins to recall the time of the Exodus in verse 34: *"Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?"* It's unprecedented. God didn't need any special forces. He came in Himself, on a search and

rescue mission. He shook Egypt and Pharaoh and all his forces and He delivered you out of there. He did this before your very eyes. Such a great salvation. Do you remember it? Have you forgotten the mighty works of God in your history? Have you forgotten that was for you? And why did He do it?

Verse 35 is very important in this chapter because Moses emphasizes that God's purpose in redeeming His people was so we might know Him. Isn't that what Jesus said in John 17:3? "*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*" That you might have a personal knowledge of the living God.

Verse 35: "*To you it was shown, that you might know [intimately] that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.*" He is the One living and true God and He wants you to know Him. So He speaks to you and shows you His ways. He disciplines you and trains you. He drives out nations before you. He brings you into this land as an inheritance.

Verses 39-40: "*Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.*" If the deeds and mercy that God has shown you matter to you, Moses is saying, you will love Him. You will obey Him. Obedience of God does not come from sheer will power, it flows out of a heart that is in love with Almighty God and the things He has done for us.

In the middle of the chapter, Moses stresses this disobedience happens when we lose sight of God and our vision. When His presence becomes distant. When His character and His ways become vague. When His Word becomes dull. When we don't have Him set before our gaze continually. What happens when we lose our vision of the living God and when we neglect His Word and forget His works? We turn to idols and worship other things. In that day and age, it was usually carved images and Moses is saying in verse 15, "*... watch yourselves very carefully...*" God didn't appear to you that way in a form. He spoke to you out of the midst of the fire.

Verse 16: "*Beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves...*" And then verse 19, "*And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars...*" and the created things and start worshipping them. Do not worship idols.

Of course in the 21st Century, this exhortation is no less urgent or relevant. We worship idols today. Tim Keller has written a great book on idolatry in the 21st Century called *Counterfeit Gods*. Listen to how he describes idolatry and then cry out, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!*” (Psalm 139:23). Where am I turning besides You?”

“What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give... A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living... An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, ‘If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.’”

So we struggle with idolatry today. It could be in the form of a career. It could be in the form of a relationship—someone whose affection and approval you so crave that if you lose it you feel like you can’t even live. It could be in the form of athletic prowess or financial things—so many different things. Even good things like ministry can become an idol to us; can become more important than God Himself.

Moses is saying to God’s people in verse 24, “*For the LORD your God is a consuming fire...*” He wants to burn away—He will burn away—whatever affections you keep in your heart that keep you from Him because He “...*is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*” A God who loves us so much that when we turn from Him to other lovers, His love rises up in anger and says, “That thing must go in order that you might know Me and experience the fullness of My love.”

So God’s jealousy is the anger of His love. It’s there because He loves us, just like as parents we love our children so much that when they are doing something that is harmful to them, our love can take on the form of anger because we care so much for their good, for their welfare. God understands that we are prone to wander.

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love...”

(Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, Robert Robinson)

In verse 25 and following, God predicts there will come a time when God’s people will turn to idols and as a result, they will be exiled among the nations.

In verse 27, they will be scattered.

In verse 28, they will serve idols there and will realize this is devastatingly empty and then they'll return to the Lord their God and find Him to be a merciful God.

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.” How do you feel when you sing the words to that hymn?

“Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.”

(Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, Robert Robinson)

Robert Robinson, a couple hundred years ago, entered a stage coach and he heard a lady humming one of her favorite tunes. It was that hymn—Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing. Robinson was an older man when he heard her humming that tune that day in that stage coach but he was a man who had been converted under the preaching of George Whitfield when he was 17 years old. He came to hear Whitfield in a drunken stupor but God's Word penetrated his heart and convinced him and Robinson was saved. He later became an evangelical minister. But when he wandered into the stage coach, he was now an older man. It had been a long time since he had walked with His God. He had gone back into the paths of sin and he had even turned away from evangelical Christianity into Unitarianism, a theological heresy. When he heard that lady joyously humming that tune, his ears perked up. He could not hide his interest and she noticed it. She said to him, “Do you know the song I am humming right now?” Robinson replied, “Madam, I *am* the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago and I would give a thousand worlds if I had them to enjoy the feelings I had then.”

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love...”

They were prophetic of his own life. Robinson experienced what Peter warns about in 2 Peter 1:9 that it's possible for a person to become so shortsighted that he is blind. Having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. It's possible to forget the gospel; to forget the wonderful things God has done for us, for our vision to get vague and clouded, for the memory of these things to be dull, for our hearts to be unaffected. It is possible.

Thankfully Robinson's life did not end far from God. God used that woman and used the very gospel words he wrote in his hymn to bring him to repentance, to draw him back to those...

“Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise...”

I'm mindful of one of the later verses he wrote that thankfully we've been singing in the last two years...

“O that day when freed from sinning,
I shall see Thy lovely face;
Clothed then in blood washed linen
How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace...”

Praise God that His is a God who keeps His forgetful people. We don't forget what matters most to us and the reason we do forget God is because right now in our fallen condition, His Words and His works don't matter enough to us. We don't treasure them as we should. But thankfully, we have a God who does not forget.

Look at verse 31. After you've wandered, after you've forsaken Him, when you are in tribulation and you're experiencing the consequences of your sin, verses 30-31 say, “...*you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God...*” The Lord your God is a merciful, merciful God to forgetful people and He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them. What we've paid dearly for, we do not forget and God has paid for us with the blood of His Son and He says, “Your name is written on My hands, engraved on My heart and I cannot forget—I cannot forsake—My people, My blood-bought people.”

On Friday afternoon, I heard Chris Fabry on WMBI interviewing a 98-year-old man. It was wonderful. Seventy years ago, he was in our nation's service at Pearl Harbor. He spoke with crystal clarity of the events of December 7, 1941—seventy years ago. Chris Fabry said, “It seems like you remember every detail.” This Veteran replied, “Oh, how could I forget. I could not forget what I saw that day—the lives that were lost; the sacrifices made.”

The blood of God's own Son was shed to seal this covenant and we matter to Him. We're a forgetful people but He's an unforgetting God.

So what matters to us we remember.

Secondly, we will be diligent to remind ourselves of the things we dare not forget. Be diligent to remind ourselves of these things. How?

When I make an appointment, I set up tons of reminders. Sometimes I have my secretary send me a note or call me. There are e-mail reminders and text message reminders, sometimes three or four reminders so I don't forget what I've committed to do. Without those reminders, I'll forget.

What does God say here? There are two things that we must be very careful to cultivate—we must be diligent to do—in order to remind ourselves of things we dare not forget.

The first is the regular ministry of God's Word. In Deuteronomy 4:9 and following, Moses is just saying, "Listen to the Word. Teach the Word to your children. Reinforce this over and over and over again." As you read through Deuteronomy, you will see that same theme reinforced constantly. Teach the Word. Remember the Word. Be in the Word. Don't forget the Word.

The other thing God gives is routines and rituals like the Passover and the Feasts. I understand that we kind of shudder at the word ritual because ritualism is not a good thing. When rituals just become things we go through without engaging our minds and our hearts, it becomes very dead. But I would just urge you not to think so highly of yourself as to imagine that you can survive long without these rituals—these habits—of reading the Word, coming to church, going to Care Group, sharing the gospel, coming to the Lord's Table twice a month. Remembering. Remembering.

Sometimes people look at these things—going to church, reading the Word, coming to the Lord's Table—as if it's so basic, like it's a little boring? But what would your life be like if you cut these habits out? How long would it take before you, like Robert Robinson, would be wandering far, far, far away from the Lord? God has given us these means of grace because He knows without them, we would forget.

Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, "...*took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me'*" (Luke 22:19).

D.A. Carson wrote a hymn about that and he said...

A shocking thing, this, that we should forget
The Savior who gave up his life –
To turn from the cross, indifferent, and let
Our minds veer toward self-love and strife.
The table, this rite, is habit – and yet
Christ's words pierce our shame like a knife:

While breaking the bread, the Lord Jesus said,
“Do this in remembrance of me.”

Enamored with power, surrounded with praise,
We set out our ecclesial plans.
Efficiency hums, and we spend our days
Defending, promoting our stands.
Techniques multiply, our structures amaze –
The gospel slips out of our hands.

While breaking the bread, the Lord Jesus said,
“Do this in remembrance of me.
O remember, remember the cross.
From my side issued water and blood,
This was no accident,
I bore the wrath of my God.”

“Remember my bed, the dank cattle shed,
Though glory was all my domain.
Remember the years of service and tears
That climaxed in lashings of pain.
By God’s own decree, your guilt fell on me,
And all of my loss is your gain.”

While breaking the bread, the Lord Jesus said,
“Do this in remembrance of me.”

“Remember my tears, Gethsemane’s fears;
Recall that my followers fled,
That I was betrayed, disowned and arraigned –
The Prince of Life crucified, dead.
Remember your shame, your sin and your blame;
Remember the blood that I shed.”

While lifting the cup, the Savior spoke up,
“Do this in remembrance of me.”

So now when we eat this feast simply spread
I blush I forget to recall.
For this quiet rite means once more I have fed
On bread that gave life once for all;
Memorial feast—just wine, broken bread—
And time to reflect on Christ’s call:

While breaking the bread, the Lord Jesus said,
“Do this in remembrance of me.”

Remember. Remember Him born in a manger...leaving the glory of heaven, He who was rich beyond all splendor, all for love's sake, "...*became poor that you through His poverty might become rich*" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Remember. Remember His tears in the Garden Gethsemane, "Father if it's possible, remove this cup from Me yet not My will but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Remember Him hanging on the tree, the suffering and the shame and the wrath of Almighty God on Him. Remember the covenant that He sealed with His blood, where God says to you, "*I will be merciful to your iniquities, I will remember your sins no more*" (Hebrews 8:12).

Let these things sink into your minds and your hearts. Let them warm you; let them move you to fresh resolve of obedience to the One who gave His life for You. He cannot forget us—His blood-bought people. He's saying to us at this table, "Forget Me not. Forget Me not."

I'm sorry that we need a reminder but one day we'll see face to face and we will never forget, "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain*" (Revelation 5:12).

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