

## **“Storyline: Remember”**

Deuteronomy 4

February 22, 2009

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

Dr. Jim Davis

---

Well it's been a week since my last sermon. But in the storyline of the Bible that many of us are reading, it's been much longer. It's been almost forty years.

Last Sunday our story came from the early years of the Exodus, not long after Moses and the people left Egypt. This week it comes from the last year of the Exodus when Moses is preparing a whole new generation to accomplish what a previous generation never could. He's getting them ready to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land.

It's a time of transition, change, and uncertainty. A whole way of life that people have gotten used to in the wilderness is about to change, suddenly and dramatically. So when you find yourself facing that kind of change, a sudden, dramatic change what do you do? How do you get ready to face an unknown future?

It's one of those abstract questions preachers like to ask. But of course it isn't just an abstract question any more, is it? Because the truth is, just like it was in Israel when Moses spoke to his people, in America right now we're facing an unknown future, and we know it. We've been hearing about it, reading about it, watching it happen for weeks now, right in front of our eyes. Our economy is bad and it's getting worse. Foreclosures are up. The market is down. Jobs are being lost and every week it seems a new financial scandal is found out. No one knows what's ahead. We're moving into uncharted territory. So what should we do?

Well we try and make wise choices. We try to make things work the best we can, don't we? We want things to go well for us and for our children. And of course, so did Israel. And Moses knew it. So in Deuteronomy Moses speaks to Israel and to us about three things we need to remember. We need, he says, to remember God. We need to remember grace. And we need to remember gratitude. If you want things to go well for you Moses says, these are the things you need to remember. So let's take some time to look at them this morning.

First of all we need to remember God. “Search all of history,” Moses says, “Search all of history from the time God created people until now and see if anything as great as this has ever happened before ... Has any other god taken one nation to himself be rescuing it from another by means of trials, miraculous signs, wonders, war, awesome power, and terrifying acts.”

Mark Galli is the managing editor for *Christianity Today*. He’s also a pastor. And in a recent book he wrote about one of his experiences. Listen.

“A group of Laotian refugees who’d been attending the Sacramento church I pastored approached me after the service one Sunday and asked to become members. Our church had sponsored them, and they’d been attending the church, but only for a few months. They had only a rudimentary understanding of the Christian faith, so I suggested we study the Gospel of Mark together for a few weeks to make sure they knew what a commitment to Christ and his church entailed. They happily agreed.

Despite the Laotians' lack of knowledge about Christianity—or maybe because of it—the Bible studies were some of the most interesting I’ve ever led. After we read the passage in which Jesus calms the storm, I began as I usually did with more theologically sophisticated groups: I asked them about the storms in their lives.

There was a puzzled look among my Laotian friends, so I elaborated: We all have storms—problems, worries, troubles, crises—and this story teaches that Jesus can give us peace in the midst of those storms. “So what are your storms?” I asked.

Again, more puzzled silence. Finally, one of the men hesitantly asked, “Do you mean that Jesus actually calmed the wind and sea in the middle of a storm?”

I thought he was finding the story incredulous, and I didn't want to get distracted with the problem of miracles. So I replied: “Yes, but we shouldn’t get hung up on the details of the miracle. We should just try and remember that Jesus can calm the storms in our lives.”

Another stretch of awkward silence ensued until another of the Laotians said, “Well, if Jesus calmed the wind and the waves, he must be a powerful man!” At this, they all nodded vigorously and chattered excitedly to one another in Lao. Except for me, the room was full of wonder. And I suddenly realized that they grasped the story better than I did.”

So I wonder this morning, for the past few weeks, we've been reading the story of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers but have we really let ourselves be grasped by the story? "Remember," Moses says. Remember who God is. Remember what He's done. Remember because if you do the past of God's people can start to impact your present.

It was Oswald Chambers I think who wrote these words. "Whatever God has done once, He can do again. Whatever God has done at any time, He can do now. Whatever God has done for anyone else, He can do for you." And that's what we need to remember, isn't it? Because the words are true; we need to remember who God is and what He can do, especially in these troubled times.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC almost a thousand years after the Exodus, Jeremiah the prophet remembered. The nation he lived in was troubled too. It was troubled by immorality and greed and economic chaos and threats from abroad. But in the midst of it all Jeremiah remembered. "Lord God!" he wrote, "You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for you."

And like Jeremiah, we can remember too. We can remember, even in troubled times, we have a God who is strong enough to save us. We can remember, even in tough times, we have a God who promises to provide for us. Even in hard times, we can remember that nothing is too hard for God. We can choose to remember God.

And we can choose to remember grace. In Deuteronomy 4:36 Moses says, "God let you hear His voice from heaven so He could instruct you. He let you see His great fire here on earth so he could speak to you from it. Because He loved your ancestors, He chose to bless you and personally brought you out of Egypt ..."

Now when we read those words we need to realize something. They are talking about grace. One of the comments that I've heard a lot in the last few weeks from people who are reading the Daily Walk Bible here at First Presbyterian goes something like this. "The Old Testament is full of laws. But it seems so different than the New Testament. Is there ever any grace in the Old Testament?"

The answer to that question my friends, is found for me in a saying that comes from the early Christian church. It goes like this. "The new is in the old concealed. The old is in the new revealed."

I wonder? Can you hear what those few words are trying to tell us because I believe they are speaking volumes. Yes there's grace in the Old Testament, but most of the time in order to see it you need to dig down a bit beneath the surface and that's exactly what we need to do with these words from Deuteronomy if we want to really understand them.

Remember Moses says that God let you hear his voice. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke God does the same thing at the time of Jesus' transfiguration. "And suddenly a cloud overshadowed them and a voice came out of the cloud saying 'This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.'"

The same voice; the same cloud; the same message; and the same grace. God's voice spoke to you, Moses says. God chose to do that. Why? Not because you deserved it or earned it, but because of His grace. God graciously loved your ancestors and has graciously chosen to bless you ..."

So remember, says Moses remember God's grace, rely on it. Because if God has been gracious to you once you can trust that God will be gracious to you again. And we need to be able to believe that especially in tough times.

So remember God. Remember grace. And remember one more thing remember gratitude.

In Deuteronomy 4:40, in the final verse of our text this morning Moses says, "If you obey all the laws and commands that I will give you today, all will be well with you and your children. Then you will enjoy a long life in the land the Lord your God is giving you."

When you hear that verse it's easy to hear the call for obedience isn't it? But I hope that now that we've talked our way through the rest of the text you can see the basis on which that call rests. Because the call to obedience in verse 40 really rests on the grace that's revealed in verse 36 and the God who reveals Himself as our protector and provider in verse 32. You see even in the Old Testament, obedience always rests on a foundation of gratitude.

Nancy Ortberg is a teacher on staff at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church. "But I worked" she says, "as a registered nurse for about ten years before my life took a different direction and one of my earliest patients was a young girl of about 14 who had been in a dirt bike accident.

I met this young girl down in the physical therapy department. She was in a whirlpool bath. I had read her chart before I went down to work with her and had learned that as a result of the accident, her leg had been amputated below the knee.

I couldn't imagine what it must be like to be a 14-year-old girl with part of your leg missing. I introduced myself, and we made some small talk. Through the course of our time together, I learned that she was a follower of Christ, although she really didn't say much about it.

What amazed about her though was her spirit, especially as she lifted her freshly amputated leg up above the bubbling water for me to see and said, "Look at how much I have left!"

She excitedly told me that since the doctors were able to amputate below the knee, it was much easier to fit a prosthesis. She wondered how long it would take to heal so that she could get started doing what the doctors had told her to do.

I heard most of what she was saying, but I wasn't really paying much attention. My mind was fixed back on the "look how much I have left!"

Her gratitude seemed really genuine. It wasn't a denial of what had happened to her or a Pollyanna mentality. She knew she was still missing a good part of her leg, but she was so very grateful for what was left and the chance it gave her to walk again if she followed the regimen of physical therapy that her doctor had told her lay ahead of her.

Her spirit, says Nancy, made me want to run that day. And I hadn't run for years.

So here's the point. I know what the market has done to my portfolio recently. I know what it's done to my kids' college funds too. I'm sure it's been pretty tough for many of us. But honestly if we still have even part of a leg to stand on financially, shouldn't we be grateful, grateful that God is still with us, grateful that his grace still promises to provide for us and grateful that we can still lead lives of obedience that can demonstrate to people around us how life is different when you have a relationship with the living God?

So remember God, remember grace, remember gratitude and grateful obedience my friends. For those are the three things we need to remember most in times of transition when the future in front of us is still unknown.

Let's pray ...