

Forget not the Lord your God

HN 23/10/05 pm

Reading: Deuteronomy 8, James 4

Study Text: Deuteronomy 8:11-20

Sing Psalms 121, 23, 127, 103:1-2

Dementia is becoming widespread in our aging society. It is sad seeing elderly people struggle to remember things from their past. They want to remember but they can't. Ironically, in their younger days they may well have preferred not to remember things from their past. Many choose to forget the good things others have done for them and the blessings they have received from the Lord. They have a spiritual dementia.

People like to keep busy with work and pleasure, taking no time to reflect on where they have come from or where they are going. They forget what family or friends have done for them when they were sick, impoverished or lonely – but they remember well what they did for others. They forget how they were saved from dangerous situations or how they got through difficult times. It was just good luck they say afterwards, even when they have prayed to God for help.

Pride and idolatry are serious sins. Those who persist in such sin will incur the wrath of God and will perish (8:19). How would you feel if you saved someone from drowning and they turned around and told everyone how they managed to save themselves (pride) or alternatively said it was just good luck (idolatry). Do not forget the Lord your God and his abundant grace.

Pride

The Lord was about to bring his people into a rich and fertile land as Moses spoke these words to them. Their years in the wilderness had come to an end. But would they remember those years and what the Lord had taught them? What did he teach them? To trust in the Lord and depend on him! Though the least of all peoples, they would conquer the Canaanites in the strength of the Lord. They would enjoy an abundance of fine foods and live in beautiful houses. But would they remember the Lord their God?

Or would they say 'we did it all ourselves'. Would they simply look at their present circumstances, forgetting the past, and say we are clever, hard working people and we have done all this. They would not have been the first to do this and certainly not the last. We are all probably guilty of thinking in this way at some time. When you are congratulated for some achievement or some good work do you give the glory to God? *Not unto us Lord not to us but to your name be the glory* was what the Psalmist said (Psalm 115).

Moses warned them against such thinking. *Beware* he said *lest* – and note the long section in brackets – *lest you say in you heart my power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth* (8:17). There it is – when the Lord gave them everything, including the resources and the power to get wealthy, how could they turn around and say 'we did it all ourselves'. But that is exactly what Moses was afraid of.

Moses knew the pride that resides in the heart of every man – even though he himself was *very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth* (Numbers 12:3). He warned these people against lifting up their hearts in pride and forgetting the Lord (8:14). The heart ruled by pride exalts the man. It exalts him above his fellow man and can easily lead to him exalting himself above God. Such self-

exaltation is of course idolatry. As the saying goes 'he is a self – made man and worships his creator'. This is the grave danger that Moses warns the people of even before they enter the Promised Land.

I hate pride and arrogance says the Lord (Proverbs 8:13). Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). The Lord sought to humble his people during the wilderness years. They were tested to see what was in their hearts, whether they would obey the commandments or not (8:2). If they did not trust in the Lord and obey him in the hard times what would they be like in the good times? Would bringing them into the good land be good for them?

Each batch of trainees we had in the College would elect a group leader for the year. I was so happy when they elected this upstanding young man. But my happiness turned to sorrow when this young man started to abuse his position and was not honest with the money. He became proud and corrupt. I stopped having such elections after this.

God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble James reminded the New Testament church (James 4:6). They were fighting among themselves to get their own way or to get the things they desired. They had become worldly and in so doing had become enemies of God. They aroused the jealous anger of God. He urged them to *humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up* (James 4:10).

Idolatry

If Israel forgot the Lord their God they would be in danger of idolatry. They could quickly turn to worshipping other gods, the Canaanite gods of this land. 'Once God is no longer acknowledged as the supremely generous giver, it is an easy step to look elsewhere for the source of life's gifts.' If they started to disregard his commandments they would begin to forget God and idolatry was just around the corner. The subsequent history of these people reveals that this is just what happened – despite this warning from Moses.

What about our own generation? The teaching of the Bible has been undermined by so-called scholarship, so that fundamental doctrines are now denied. The commandments have been attacked and are widely disregarded. The way was then opened for idolatry, for other gods, to enter into our society. After the Beatles mocked Jesus and exalted themselves they turned to Hinduism to the worship of idols. Many have followed this same path, the pathway to destruction as some of this group found to their horror.

Remember

It is imperative that you remember the grace of God shown to you in redemption and in sustaining you to this very day. To remember well will keep you from becoming proud and idolatrous.

Redemption – *the Lord brought you out of the house of bondage* (8:14). They were helpless and hopeless slaves when the Lord delivered them from their cruel masters. How could they forget such mighty deliverance? They were free; they were alive, only because of the grace and power of God.

On Anzac Day we remember men who fought and died in war to give us freedom in this land. How much more should we remember Jesus Christ who died to deliver us from bondage to sin and death, and give us the glorious freedom of the kingdom of God? He has given us the Lords Day, one day in seven to remember him. He has given us the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to remember him.

Like Moses, Jesus knew how easily his disciples would forget what he was doing and so he gave them and us this sacrament to remember him by. Jesus was about to enter the kingdom of God when he instituted

this supper. He said to those who had been with him during many trials *I bestow on you a kingdom...that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribe of Israel* (Luke 22:29).

Israel was given the Passover to help them remember their redemption from bondage in Egypt. But during the times of the Judges this celebration was abandoned. They were dark days, as indeed were those that followed under the kings. In the days of King Josiah, the book of the Law was found, and the Passover once again was celebrated (II Kings 23:22).

Guidance – the Lord guided the people through the wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. The Lord led them through that great and terrible wilderness (8:15). He kept them from getting lost. The Lord guides us still today by his Word and his Spirit – if we will listen and obey. On the pathway of life you will face many intersections, many turns you can take. The Lord promises to guide you, to help you in making decisions if you will look to him. ...*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith* (Hebrews 12:2).

Protected – venomous snakes and scorpions threatened the people as they passed through the wilderness (8:15). On one occasion snakes bit and killed many when they rebelled. Through a bronze serpent the Lord saved many (Numbers 21).

Has the Lord ever protected you in a time of danger? I am sure he has if you care to remember. They were not in danger of car accidents there in the wilderness but you are almost every day. Maybe you have been in danger from fire or in a storm. Millions around us are suffering from earthquakes, floods, and famine. Wars threaten the lives of multitudes. Are you immune from such dangers? Do not forget the Lord who watches over us day and night (Psalm 121).

Provision – water from the flinty rock and manna from heaven (8:15, 16). The Lord fed these people all those years in the wilderness. They were to learn that *man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God* (8:3). Is this a lesson you have learnt? Have you ever been hungry or thirsty? Maybe not, for we live in a rich land. Still we must learn this lesson. The people of Zimbabwe once had plenty to eat but now they are starving. People in Europe once had plenty to eat but then Hitler came.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes from the Father of lights (James 1:17). *My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:19). Do you believe this? Do you remember the Lord who gives you life and health and strength, *who gives you the power to get wealth* (8:18). The Lord remembers the covenant he made with you in the blood of Jesus Christ his own beloved Son. Will you remember him? Then keep his commandments!

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon