

A Living Hope - Part 5

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of remembrance and forgetting in the Christian life, highlighting the need to focus on God's faithfulness and patience, and to press on towards the mark of the on high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Duration: 39:27

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:2-18, Philippians 3:10, Philippians 3:13-14

Topics: "Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the similarities between the books of Deuteronomy and Philippians, highlighting a point of transition or crisis in both. In Deuteronomy, the transition refers to the Israelites' journey from the wilderness to the Promised Land. The preacher emphasizes that during this time, God tested the Israelites to reveal what was in their hearts and to make them know His faithfulness and patience. The preacher also mentions the importance of recognizing our own shortcomings and weaknesses in order to experience God's intended purpose for our lives. The sermon emphasizes the need for self-reflection and reliance on God's guidance in times of transition.

Transcript

Back again to the chapter which has just been read, the eighth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, verse two, and thou shalt remember all the ways which the Lord thy God hath led thee. In the letter to the Philippians, chapter three, verse thirteen, brethren, I count not myself yet to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, stretching forward to the things which are before. I press on toward the goal, unto the prize of the on high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Thou shalt remember, forgetting the things which are behind. Remembering and forgetting. In these two passages, which look like a contradiction, but we shall see are not, we have firstly an exhortation to grateful recollection.

Thou shalt remember all the ways which the Lord thy God hath led thee. And then an exhortation to profitable resume, gathering up the lessons for the future. Finally, an exhortation to purposeful resolve, forgetting, I press toward the mark.

In both places, Deuteronomy and Philippians, we have one point of likeness and similarity. There are others. But this, they both mark a point of transition, if you like, of crisis.

In the former case, a big change was about to take place. All that Moses said, as you have heard in this long discourse, was said in relation to that transition. There's a change about to take place in leadership.

There's a change from a period of deep and drastic preparation, from a phase of pioneering the way, the laying of the foundations for the future. Change from that to the time of proving the value of all that had been, and taking up responsibility by means of it. Transition from a period of child training, what is called chastening, discipline, to possession of the inheritance and an exercise of stewardship.

If you gather all those features together, you will see quite clearly that they represent the stages and phases of any normal Christian experience. A true Christian life or pilgrimage should be marked by those characteristics. It has its stages.

Divinely appointed economies for these different phases of the Christian life. At one time, certain things obtained and are the governing, outstanding, quite conspicuous ways of the Lord. Time comes when those lose or pass from their particular place, prominence, and other things take their place.

But within those changing economies, there are always these two things that I have mentioned. Preparation and fulfillment or responsibility. The laying down of a ground, the providing by God of experience, of instruction, and then the point at which all that is going to be put to the test as to its real meaning to those concerned.

To be put to the test as they are forced into a way of new responsibility. It may be that it is the individual's experience, and it very often is, for most of us can see the stages and phases of our Christian life as we have moved on through various crises from one phase to another. It may be true of a company of the Lord's people.

It may be true of the whole Church. But there it is. And at such a time when the Lord brings us face to face now with the issues of all that has been, in the light of a new day, with its new demands, its new responsibilities, at such a time there is a great value in remembrance.

At such a time, the Lord says, thou shalt remember. And there are two sides to the remembrance, or the recollection. There is the human side.

It is here in this chapter, all the way in which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in this wilderness, he might try thee, prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandment or no. But as we have often said that the Lord did not know what was in their heart and had to put them into situations to discover it, that more correctly that he might make thee know. The later statement about the basis of man's subsistence, not bread alone, to make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, can well govern this earlier statement, to make thee know what was in thy heart.

That is an essential uncovering, disclosure, if there is going to be all that the Lord intends. It is certainly the most painful experience or part of life under the hand of God, that by his dealings, by his ways, by his methods, by his means with us, we should be coming more and more desperately to recognize what kind of people we are, really. All the disillusionment about ourselves, if we were ever at all proud or self-sufficient, or had any opinion of ourselves, that we were anything, this devastating uncovering of our true selves as God sees and knows.

It is perhaps the most terrible aspect of a life under the hand of God, but it is absolutely essential to the purpose of God. No doubt about that. And there is no doubt that that is one of the things that the Lord

does with a life when he gets it into his hands.

Sooner or later, he has laid that life bare to itself, that it has no confidence in the flesh whatever. To make thee know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandment or no, and what was the verdict upon the forty years, no. It was no.

They were not capable of doing it in themselves, and they proved to themselves and to all that it was not in them to do it. And thou shalt remember that. We too easily in the day of blessing, as the chapter goes on, the chapter goes on to show, we too easily in the day of blessing forget that work of humbling and emptying and breaking, which the Lord did as a part of the very foundation of everything.

That's how we are made. That's human nature. And so the word comes with tremendous emphasis, thou shalt remember.

There are very many of those phrases with God, thou shalt, thou shalt. One of the imperatives, one of the emphatics of God, thou shalt remember. You must keep in mind always that the foundation of everything is your own unworthiness of anything at all.

You will never, never come to appreciate all the grace and mercy of God and all his goodness and kindness and his patience and his longsuffering and his forbearance of which the forty years are such a history. You'll never come to appreciate that unless on this other side you have come to realize what Paul said of himself, in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. There is no merit for this in me.

Thou shalt remember that side. But then, over against the human side of self-discovery, so much weakness and so much failure, so much shame and breaking down, there's the divine side. Oh, what a story of faithfulness on God's part.

Faithfulness of God is magnified as the true nature of man is revealed under his hand. Thou shalt remember that while it was true that you could not be relied upon, depended upon at all, you failed at every point of testing and of trying, that you proved yourself to be utterly worthless under every regime. While that is true, God didn't give you up.

God didn't abandon you. God didn't wash his hands of you. He remained faithful.

The Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in loving-kindness, that stands on the divine banner over all the tribes for forty years. Infinite patience, infinite long-suffering, thou shalt remember. This is the foundation, and this is, as I have said, necessary whenever, whenever it is the Lord's purpose to lead into something more for his glory and honor.

An hour of bringing home, that's what it is here. An hour of bringing home two things. You are not the people better than any others, but God is infinitely merciful to the poorest stuff of humanity.

Paul, in the other passage in Philippians, is also at a point of transition. As we know, in the writing of that letter, he's in prison. The time of his departure is at hand.

He doesn't know, from day to day, whether he will be led out to his death. He has hopes that there might be an extending, but he's writing as though the end were very near. I'm already being offered up, you hear it? Already being offered up.

The time of my departure is at hand. It's a time of transition with him and for the churches. The leadership is changing.

All that has come in by way of the pioneering, the foundation laying, the teaching and the training is now to give place to the proof of its value by those to whom it has been given. That's what comes in. What this may mean to us, I don't know.

Over a week ago, the Lord put this word into my heart very strongly. Those of you who were here on the day of prayer on Thursday will remember that our brother read this chapter and spoke about it. I'm trying to protect myself by saying that.

No, the word is there, and what the Lord means by it, well, we must seek to know. We are, at any rate, passing now into a new year. It's a time of transition.

There may be something much more than that in the time in which we live. The Lord may, oh, may it be true, may be intending to lead us into something more than ever we have known of himself, for that is what is here. In order to do it, in order to do it, it is essential for us to remember on the one side that it will all be of grace, and the Lord has been very, very thorough in making that clear.

All of grace being left to us, or if we'd been left to ourselves, what an awful state would exist of hopelessness. But through all, and it's a big all for many, all the way, all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee, what a way it's been, way of fiery trials, deepest testing, much suffering, all the way, he has not left us. He has been faithful.

It's a miracle of his faithfulness. Those of us who have any experience will say that without any hesitation. It's a miracle.

It's the miracle of his faithfulness that we are here today. Let that be established, and then, of course, you can move on with anticipation. Because in neither of these places, Moses or Paul, is this the end.

It's only the beginning. The beginning is something more. That's very wonderful, very wonderful.

In the case of Moses, he's entirely forgetting himself. He knows he's not going on into it with them. He knows so far as he is concerned, his course is finished.

And yet, and yet, he's just full of the prospect. Taken up with the prospect. His words, his words about this wonderful land, this wonderful land that they are going into, not he, but they are going into.

You can hardly believe that he's not going in. What would you expect naturally? If you knew that it was not for you, but for others. You would probably be in a very depressed mood.

But no, his glory in the prospect, the wonderful prospect, forgetting himself. Paul, he knows that his course is run. I've finished my course.

I've kept the faith. And yet, for him it's not the end by any means. I think this is very wonderful, don't you, dear friends, that Paul did not close down at that point and say this is the end.

But even if I've only got another hour, another day, another week, I press on. I'm not now closing down. I'm going on.

And why? Because like Moses, he's seen far, far more ahead than ever had been before. That lay behind. Because that which was before far outweighed all that he had come into thus far, even after all these years.

He saw so much more. See, these are the two great lessons of life. Where does hope lie? Where does hope lie? Negatively, you have to say, well, looking at myself as I now see myself in the light of God's uncovering for everything, I have to say there's no hope there.

There's no hope there. There's no hope in me. I am.

I have proved that I am hopeless in this realm of things. And that is what Paul was referring to when he said forgetting. What was it he said forget? Look at the chapter again and you'll see.

All the things in which there was no hope. All the things in which there was no hope. He's recounting those things which he said which were gain to me in the old life.

All the things that made up this world for me in the past come to see that they were no ground of hope at all. I have come to see that though I may have had everything that this world aspires after, men are ambitious to get. There's no hope in all that at all.

No hope. The great lesson of life on the one side is that. To discover where there is no hope.

And to leave it. To leave it. Leave the hopeless ground.

Forget it. Oh for this grace of forgetfulness. In this matter of any rate.

Forgetfulness is a great trouble to some of us the older we get. But here is something in which it is good to have a poor memory. A lot of people who are trying every day of their lives to keep this thing before them.

The ground of their hopelessness. That's what Paul says you can forget. You can forget that.

Everything in which there is really no hope. It's a great life lesson. Have you looked at things as Paul looked at them and he tabulated them one by one? One by one.

Laid them out. Got them all there arranged. And then over every one he said nothing in that.

In this realm of things. And nothing in that in this realm of things. That doesn't provide any ground in this heavenly realm.

Writing them all off one by one. There's no prospect in that for heavenly things. So let's forget it.

Let's forget it. On the other side of course to learn where hope lies. What is the ground of hope? And here Paul is but the counterpart of Moses.

Moses is bringing into view the land. The land. The wonderful land.

Flowing with milk and honey. With all its wealth. With all its fruitfulness.

All its depth and fullness. It's all in view. And we now today know that all that is but a prophetic pointer to the spiritual.

We know we've heard it hundreds of times perhaps that that land depicts typically Christ. The heavenly country. Christ in whom all the fullness dwells.

Hear Moses talking about riches and wealth in the land and then hear Paul crying, Oh the depth of the riches. Oh the depth of the riches. What he had seen in Christ.

The land and Christ are part and counterpart. Fullness of Christ. Where is the hope to deliver Moses from despair and Israel from despair? It lies in Christ.

Christ in you the hope of glory. What with Paul? Well his outlook was not too inspiring you know. He had many things that made up a ground of very real depression.

All they which be in Asia have forsaken me. Then he mentions different ones who have left him. And looking at himself in his situation not too inspiring from the natural point.

Cut off from all his beloved friends. Shut up on this chain. Reduced to pen and paper.

All this. What is going on. The reports coming to him of departures and what not.

The man is not for a moment cast down in depression. Why? He has seen how much more there is in the Lord Jesus than he has ever attained unto. Christ is bigger than it all that's what it is.

His Christ is bigger than everything. All the accumulated discouragement. Christ is bigger.

And so he says I've counted everything lost. And as refuse that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Forgetting the things which are behind.

I press toward the mark of the prize of the on high calling of God in Christ Jesus. There's the hope. That saves from despair.

I wonder dear friends if this is all words to you. Is it? What would be your salvation? In a time of severe trial and disappointment and discouragement and opposition. Perhaps of disillusionment.

What would be your salvation? What alone could be your salvation? I suggest to you that it is that the Christ that you have seen come to know is bigger than all that. I mean that you just cannot give up everything because of the difficulties. Because what you have seen of Christ is so real.

It is not theory. It is not mere teaching. It is not mere verbiage.

Oh it's your own heavenly vision. Heavenly vision. You've seen.

You've seen what you've seen. You just cannot unsee. What has come to you, you cannot let go of some mere thing.

It's your life. And when I say it, I mean him. What the land was to Moses, Christ was to Paul.

Very, very real. Very wonderful. Very great.

And that was hope in a day when it might well have been despair and deep depression. So, what is it? It's the fullness of Christ, isn't it, after all? The fullness of Christ that has got a grip on the heart. Pulling at the heart strings and drawing on and drawing on and getting through the transition of disappointment, of

sorrow, of anguish, of all that into which we've been brought in those training ways of God.

When it would be so easy, oh so easy, to give it all up, if it were not that we have seen the land, that we have been to Pisgah's mountain, and viewed that we had some revelation of Jesus Christ to our hearts that just cannot, cannot be given up as something that does not work and does not matter. No. That I may know him.

That I may know him, Paul says in this chapter. That I may know him. No, it isn't the quest of a beginner.

It's the quest of a man at the end of a long, full life of learning Christ. To hear at the end with that so full, rich knowledge of his Lord, gained through all the years, gained through all the years of training. With that, he says in effect, my knowledge of the Lord is such that I see far, far beyond my present attainment and experience that he's far, far greater than anything to which I have yet come.

So it's that I may know him. Well, dear friends, again I say what it all means. To us, I don't know, but I do feel this, that you must recognize this, that there does come a time in the Christian life when the Lord says, now look here, I've been dealing with you, I've been working with you, I have been making you know and understand very much.

Now the time has come when all that is going to be put to the test as to its real value. Have you learned the lessons? What does it amount to now in your being able to take responsibility in spiritual things? Those crises arrive from time to time and they're very real. And a new phase of things is breaking upon the people of God just now.

Don't think I'm wrong if I say that time has begun when the people of God are going to be put to the test as to their inheritance, to what they have received from the Lord. Really put to the test. That is happening.

Now, let us gather up all the values of our past experience of the Lord and his past dealings with us. Let us gather them up and bring them to this resolve. This resolve I press on.

I press on. I press toward the mark, the prize of the on high calling of God in Christ Jesus. I wonder if tonight we can come to that resolve.

Individually, you may have been in the fires, having a pretty hard time, painful time in your spiritual life. But believe me that if these scriptures mean anything at all, they mean that God has only been preparing for something more. That's what I want to strike in this weekend, the note of hope.

No, no, God is not the God who believes in bringing everything to an end. Not at all. God is always after something more.

He's made like that. I so put it. That is God.

More, something more. Something more. And if he has to clear the way for something more by devastating methods, all right, it's something more that he's after.

Because there is so much more. Far, far transcending all our asking or thinking. So much more.

The Lord does want that so much more, dear friend. I began to say it may be individual. It may be as to a company.

And I'm quite sure many here will read between the lines of what I'm saying. The Lord does deep, deep plowing. But it's always ways to do deep sowing.

He means a harvest. He means a crop. It's something more that the Lord is after.

And his past dealings, though they may seem to have been devastating, are only in the light of that so much more that he would have. But here, it's this resolve. I'm not giving up.

I'm not giving up. I'm not letting go. I'm not going to quit.

I'm going on. By the grace of God, I press toward the mark. May that spirit be found in us.

Shall we pray?

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