

Aliens Included

Deuteronomy 8:3-14; Psalm 74:12-21; Luke 9:16-27

Who is Central
in Your Life?



We are called to remember, lest we forget. We celebrate the past of what God has done for His people, to keep us more aware of the importance of our redemption and our dependence upon God. We need at times to be reminded of God's indiscriminate provision and care for those in need. We too quickly forget that the gospel is good news for those who are cut off from the Land of God's promise. The gospel is a word of blessing for those who find themselves outside of God's care, but a challenge to commitment for those within the fold. When we have become comfortable with the gospel, we fall into comfort routines that ignore the demands that God holds over our lives.

It is the hungry who need feeding. It is the thirsty who need drink. It is the homeless who need housing, and the jobless who need employment. It is those who are aliens to the gospel of grace who are in need of the words of life. So it has been for generations, centuries, millennia. It is true today, just as much as ever.

Yahweh took a people in bondage and listened to their cries. God took them into the wilderness where they might learn to depend upon God's provision for their needs. Again and again, Moses reminds them how God humbled them that they might recognize that *Yahweh* was faithful to provide. We find the nation in the wilderness, being reminded of *Yahweh's* unfailing love for those with no protector. We are reminded again and again how *Yahweh* showed this people undeserved mercy in bringing them out of bondage. They are warned not to make too much of comfort and ease, lest they come to forget.

It is perhaps simpler to trust God when there is no other way to live. This is what the passage is getting at. We readily cry out to God in the midst of distress and misfortune, when we have no where else to turn. It is when our bellies are full that we forget our dependence upon God. So here Moses warns the people in preparation for the coming time of God's blessing and provision. When they have entered the Land of Promise, they are to remember all God has done for them. They are to remember manna in the wilderness and water in barren places. They are to relive God's care for their clothing and protection of their feet. He calls them to remember and sing, for it is all too easy to forget.

We often think that people lose faith in God in the midst of trouble, pain, distress, and hardship. Oh, we use these events as excuses to reject God, but that is not where we truly lose faith. Faith is lost much more readily, however, in the midst of comfort, bounty, and material blessing. Moses did not worry about the people losing their faith when the water ran out or when there was nothing to eat. He knew they would remember and cry out to *Yahweh* for aid in those times of need. He spoke of the times of dire need as humbling the people to teach them to live on the words of *Yahweh*. Times of duress are times for growth and faith development. They are the training ground of faith.

Moses was more concerned over what would happen when the people had been blessed by entering the "Land flowing with milk and honey." How would they respond when God's provision turned to abundance and comfort? It is in our comfort that faith is wont to die. When our needs are met, we forget to cry and live in dependence upon the God who sustains us. It is then that faith grows lax. It is in our comfort that we are tempted to relegate God to the margins of our lives.

When we are comfortable, it is all too easy to isolate ourselves from a world in need. It is too comfortable to sit in our pews and overlook reports of a 15-year-old shot to death in Atlantic City for refusing a kiss. It is too easy to brush aside reports of over 250 homeless Lynchburg residents or that 23 percent of Lynchburg children live below the poverty level. It is too easy to ignore that 1 of four Lynchburg households must spend over 30% of their income on housing. What about the one thousand households in our own county living on less than \$1250 per month? Are they reflected in our churches or have we somehow overlooked them in our sharing the gospel of God's grace?

The passage we read today does not address the issue directly, but two chapters ahead we read of God's identity as protector of those with none to speak for them. At heart, remembering how *Yahweh* brought the people out of Egypt concerns their responsibility to follow God's example in rescuing others. It is about remembering that they too were once aliens, estranged, and cut off from the blessings that God had to provide for them. They, too, were once slaves in Egypt, powerless, with none to speak on their behalf. Then God intervened.

As Moses warned the Hebrews, we tend to grow contented and comfortable when our basic needs are met. Where there is food on the table and clothing in one's closets it becomes harder to look beyond our property lines. We forget all too easily to thank God for the blessings of indiscriminate provision. We raise our own personal expectations and become blind to the needs around us. We must pause to remember what God has brought us from and what He has taken us through. We celebrate, lest we forget the quality of God's provision and bounty.

As they now prepare to enter God's blessing, they must recall what God has done for them. They must consider God's concern for others who are yet enslaved, oppressed, or otherwise cut off from the good news of God's accessibility. They must remember, even as we pause to remember today.

Remembering is about more than not forgetting. It is returning to the wilderness to renew our dependence upon God. It is a call to reflection, a call to action, a call to renew faith and cast our lives once more at the mercy of God's indiscriminate provision. Jesus did not question who the crowds believed him to be before feeding them. He was more concerned with meeting their needs. They would discover who Jesus was as a result of His care. Jesus did not stop to determine who was worthy. Jesus did not labor over discerning one's degree of knowledge. He seems to have been much more worried with meeting needs and teaching the disciples to make use of God's resources on behalf of others.

Who is worthy of God's blessings, anyway? Lest we forget, we were once aliens and cut off from the blessings of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. God, in indiscriminate mercy, came down to rescue us and bring us into the realm of grace. In the final analysis, we must remember that as we were aliens and God cared for us, so we are to seek out those who have yet not found God's care and provision for their lives. As God included us when we were yet aliens to the Gospel, so we are reminded to reach out to others who are yet alienated from the gospel.

Lest we forget that the gospel is the message of God's indiscriminate grace and mercy, let us remember—let us act. If we become too comfortable, we alienate ourselves from God's indiscriminate grace and mercy. As the 5000, we risk being fed by Jesus and not knowing who feeds us. May we never forget that grace is for all, aliens and strangers included.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*