

Recall and Recount

Can you recall a time when you had to say goodbye to a loved one? Either through death or a move? At the minimum, it can leave us vulnerable. It can leave us downcast. I would like to look at two people from Scripture and see how they prepared to leave those who were following them.

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 “And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ² You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

⁶ Keep them and do them, for 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.’ ⁷ 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? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? ⁹ “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—“

In the passage we just read, Moses is speaking to the Israelites near the end of his life. He is saying goodbye. These Israelites are the children of those who fled Egypt. They did not have a personal memory of the horrible bondage in Egypt. They did not see the miracle of the Red Sea being parted. From chapter one, Moses is recounting their history. Most of those he is speaking to only have the memory of the wilderness time.

A key theme in this section is “obey”. That word is said three times in these few verses. Moses is reminding them the importance of obedience, since their ancestors did not obey and therefore their 11 day journey turned into 40 years.

The Lord is impressing on the Israelites to be obedient. It was God's desire all along to bring them into the promised land. It was not God's desire that they perish in the wilderness. That was a tragedy of failure on their part and it was a failure of faith. They failed to enter in by faith to that which God had promised to them. God had laid it out and said, "Here it is. It's yours." But they saw the giants in the land and the high-walled cities instead of God. They set their eyes upon the obstacles rather the power of God to remove the obstacles.

In the passage we read there is also a warning from Moses. Not only to obey, but not to forget what God has done in the past, and teach that to your children and grandchildren.

We are surprised that the Israelites seem to forget God’s provision for them; their 400 years of slavery, the miracles in Egypt, the saving through the Red Sea, the provision of food, etc. They start to grumble and complain. We know this from the 14 complaints recorded in Exodus and Numbers.

The Lord even gave them an object lesson in the form of the Passover. A feast they would celebrate yearly to remind themselves of God’s provision for them over the last plague.

Similar to Moses giving the Israelites his last reminders before he dies, we read about Jesus doing the same thing in John 14 with the 11 disciples. He is giving them some final teachings before His death. He will need to leave them, just like Moses will be leaving the Israelites. Jesus reminds them that they will not be orphans, but He will send another Helper, the Holy Spirit. Similar to Moses, Jesus repeats a teaching several times in that chapter, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15).

Jesus showed His love of the Father by being obedient to the will of the Father. Jesus even humbled Himself to death on a cross. That type of love is what a disciple of Jesus should have. Loving Jesus should naturally lead to heart-led obedience.

We think we will not forget God’s goodness to us, but we often do. When we forget, we run into an attitude of ungratefulness. When we forget, we are unable to bear witness to God’s work in our lives. To help us remember, Jesus gave us the Lord’s Supper. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19).

Just like the Israelites, forgetting is a mistake that we often make as we look at our own lives and we look at the dominion that our flesh has had over us. We’re prone to look at the obstacles. We say, “Oh, this looks impossible.” or “I’m so weak.” or “I’ve tried so hard and you don’t know how long I’ve been struggling with this thing”. We’re looking at the obstacles rather than the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver us from those obstacles. It is important that we not fail where they failed but that we, by faith, take a position of strength, by walking in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Amen.