

Deuteronomy 8:10-18

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[0 : 00] I'm going to take a bit of a departure this morning from the book of Colossians. Let me ask you to take out your copy of God's Word and turn to the book of Deuteronomy chapter 8.

At the rate we're going, I fear that we're never going to get through Colossians 3. Although at some point here will happen, I've made so many adjustments to the original schedule.

But we'll get there. There are two reasons today. We're going to take a bit of a break, a little step away from Colossians 3. The first has been mentioned now a few times. This is the minor reason, and that is that I'm not feeling well.

I think I have quite a cold. I really probably shouldn't be here right now. I'm always and ever sustained by God's grace, and part of His grace to me this morning is cold medicine. I'm having a bit of an out-of-body experience right now.

So, the late missionary Jim Elliott once said, wherever you are, be all there. And I try to do that wherever I am.

[1 : 04] I would like to add to that, though, unless you're on cold medicine, then go home and go to sleep. But nonetheless, I'm here. The second reason, and the major reason that I am here not feeling well, is that this Sunday is likely this Wimke family's last Sunday with us.

They have been preparing for a bit over a year now, believing that the Lord is leading them to go to Germany, the south of Germany to a rather whimsical part of Germany called the Black Forest, through an organization called Teach Beyond to serve with Black Forest Academy.

And Black Forest Academy is a boarding school for missionary kids, for parents who are on the field in places that are particularly dangerous, or in places that don't offer the education necessary for their children.

And it's a great organization. We had some misgiving about it at the beginning, but as we've grown to know it more, and as the Zwimpies particularly have invested themselves there, we have grown to love what they're doing.

And so the Zwimpies are going to be going. Ryan is going to be teaching chorus. Kathleen's going to get to be, at least for some time, a stay-at-home, which will be really wonderful, both to minister to those kids that are there at Black Forest Academy, as well as the people in the region.

[2 : 31] We have been joining with them in this effort in a number of ways. We mentioned during our time of offering ministry partners, and the Zwimpies are one of those for us, a portion of our church budget.

So if you give here, a portion of that goes to help the support of the Zwimpies. They were asked to raise their own support. This is the way Black Forest Academy functions. So they had to raise their living expenses for the time that they'll be there.

And I know that many of you individually, personally, have encouraged and supported them as well. We as a church have been praying for this. We've been eagerly looking for this, and they've done such a great job of including in this effort, of keeping us updated about where they were, and percentage, and posting consistently.

Kathleen shared with me that she was concerned she was doing it too much. And I said, no, it's been great. We've wanted to know exactly where you were. And coming into this week, they were at 76%.

24% is a long way to go, but trusting that the Lord would provide. They've sold their house. They've been waiting. We've got tons of their stuff boxed and ready to be shipped downstairs here at the building.

[3 : 45] Faithfully believing that God intended for them to go and be in this place. And Sam and I had the pleasure this weekend, Friday evening and into Saturday, of going to a wedding.

Some precious young people in our church. And the Zwimkies went as well. And so we decided to make a bit of a weekend of it. And we went away together. And we're just joyful to be renting a house together, to wake up on Saturday morning and have Kathleen share that they're now 100% funded to be able to go to Black Forest Academy.

And Amen is right. And it's incredible to see the way they have devoted themselves to this effort, the way that this church has come around them in devoting to the effort.

Even though it was my great task at the beginning to convince them not to leave, to have my heart turned and be desirous for them to get to go and to serve in this way, to even have my joy complete in seeing them go and to serve.

And my mind just very quickly as they were sharing all of the individuals in our church that have been giving, just the way that they've been blown away by it, my mind was just moved to how very good God is to us and how consistent He is in His promises.

[5 : 11] And so I just want to, in brief, keep my comments short this morning, but in brief, talk a bit about that. So in Deuteronomy 8, God commands Israel, His people, to remember what He has done for them.

And I'll begin reading in verse 10. Verse 11.

Verse 12.

So post-Exodus and the Israelites being established in the land, God is saying to them, be careful, be warned, because as things go well with you, you may forget who has caused things to go well with you.

And as we have endeavored, particularly as Ryan and Kathleen have been throwing their energy into the fundraising effort, and as we have joined around them, it would be easy to think that this was a thing that they or we accomplished.

[7 : 20] And it was not. It was a thing that the Lord accomplished. Be careful lest you forget, lest you say, my power and the might of my power and the might of my hand have done this or that.

And the Israelites were faithful to this, to the recording and to the reminding one another of the good things that God has done. And the Psalms are full of Psalms that are a recounting of what God had done for the people of Israel.

Listen to Psalm 63 as David talks about the effect that the remembering has for him. Beginning in verse 5, My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips when I remember you upon my bed and meditate you on the watches of the night.

For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you. Your right hand upholds me. And this is when David was in a time of great trouble.

He was in the wilderness of Judah escaping for his life. And he says, When I remember the things that the Lord has done for me, a number of things happen.

[8 : 36] He sings for joy. His soul clings to the Lord because he knows that the Lord's good right hand or His mighty hand is what upholds and supports him.

You see the effect that remembering has. And the Lord throughout the Old Testament commanded Israel to do this physically. To set up altars that would remind them as they traveled in the land of the things that God had done.

So let's look at an example of that, if you will. Turn to Joshua chapter 4. And here we see an example of this.

It's God commanding, after accomplishing something for Israel, commanding that they do a particular thing. Beginning in verse 1, When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan. So the people of God, Israel, being brought out of the wilderness and into the land that God had promised them, through the Jordan River, the Lord said to Joshua, Verse 2, Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, and command them, saying, Take twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you lodged tonight.

[10 : 04] Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. And Joshua said to them, Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of tribes of the people of Israel, that this may be a sign among you.

When your children ask in time to come, what do these stones mean to you? Then you will tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off, so these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever. To remember what God had done for them, so that when the children would ask, they could pass on and they could impart that truth.

Beloved, now as the people of God, we have the record of it. While we don't physically see the stones, and ask what does this pile of twelve stones mean, we see the story and the record of what happened, and what God had done for His people, and the way He has commanded them to remember.

Another example is found in 1 Samuel. If you will turn there with me. This will be the last text for this morning. 1 Samuel 7. If you only have a New Testament with you today, you only have a third of the Bible with you.

[11 : 35] Samuel was a prophet of God. Samuel was the one who anointed Saul, and then David. I'll frame this for you. This is pre-Saul and David.

So that Saul is chosen in chapter 9. This is chapter 7, verse 3. And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashteroth, which was a Canaanite god.

This would have been an idol of Ashteroth. From among you, and direct your heart to the Lord, and serve Him only. And He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashteroth, and they served the Lord only. Then Samuel said, Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you.

So they gathered at Mizpah, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

[12 : 37] Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel, and when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

And the people of Israel said to Samuel, Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines. So Samuel took a nursing lamb, and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord.

And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him. As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines, and threw them into confusion, and they were routed before Israel, destroyed before Israel.

And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah, and pursued the Philistines, and struck them as far as below Bethcot. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it up between Mizpah and Shin, and called its name Ebenezer.

For he said, Till now the Lord has helped us. So he did this thing, not commanded by the Lord this time, but rather in praise of God.

[13 : 48] He set up a stone, and I think that would probably mean he took a stone maybe that was a long stone, and set it up on its end. He did something with it to make people take note of this stone, and he called it Ebenezer.

It's actually a phrase in Hebrew. Eben Ha-Ezer. A stone of help. That's what it means literally. We sing a song here quite often that talks about an Ebenezer.

Are your minds going to it? It's called Come Thou Fount. The second verse says, Here I raise my Ebenezer. Here by Thy great help I've come, and I hope by Thy good pleasure safely to arrive at home.

Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God, He to rescue me from danger, interposed His precious blood. And that verse is about establishing in our minds and our hearts, not a physical stone raising, but rather raising an Ebenezer in our mind and heart to the redemptive work of Christ.

That's what this song is about, and that's where this comes from. This Eben Ha-Ezer, our God, our stone of help. And so my exhortation to you today, setting the stage for you, beginning with what's been going on with the Zwimpies, and the way that we've been participating with them, is that we use this as a great reminder of God's faithfulness to us in a couple of ways.

[15 : 28] Firstly, God, in the life of our church, has always been faithful to provide to us the people we needed for our church. At the most particular of times, and in the most special of ways, God has brought each and every one of you here.

I'm thankful today, particularly for the Zwimpies. They have told me that they came at a time that they were hurting, that they needed close fellowship, that they needed to be served, but the opposite is absolutely true.

At a time where we were incredibly hungry for families to come along and to invest and to serve young people. What a blessing they have been. And I know, at least for me, maybe not for you, but for me, when a family leaves our congregation that is so single people full, it hurts a little bit. Oh, but we need families. We need families so much as if the Lord doesn't know what we need. But He certainly does. And just as He's taking the Zwimpies from us, I am confident that He will continue to provide exactly what we need.

And we ought to remember this. This. The financial provision for the Zwimpies is a thing we should remember. I am amazed.

[16:50] I believe Ryan's going to share in a bit the degree to which our church is sending them. It is wonderful as a church with a tiny, tiny budget, able collectively out of our budget to just take 2% of our giving, with the way in which you guys have sacrificially gone above and beyond that to continue to give and to support and to go.

We as a collective body are the major senders of the Zwimpies. That is a great encouragement to me. We run on a tight budget around here.

Praise God, we have a building and property that's paid for. It doesn't take a lot to take care of this, the physical things that we see. He has always, always, always provided just what we've needed over the past six and a half plus years.

We've never been without those things necessary for the work being done here. I'll give you one quick physical example. Those of you who were here months ago heard the story that the pullout on the street was struck by lightning.

I got here one morning and the internet was down. Couldn't figure out what was going on. Called AT&T; up. Everything that was electronic downstairs fried. So all of the modems and the wireless broadcasters and the really expensive copy machine that we lease, everything in that line got hit.

[18:14] And yes, it was all service protected properly. Just sometimes things don't go as expected. We had to fix the copier. We had to replace the things downstairs.

And the very day that I realized this, that it happened, and I was calling the insurance company and figuring out what we were going to have to do. We have a thousand dollar deductible on the insurance. We got a check in the mail from a dad, I think, I'm just connecting the last name, I believe the dad of a young man who came here for a while and I hadn't seen in months and months and months and months.

No clue why this father was compelled to sit down and write a check to our church. Maybe he thinks his son is still in church and this is where he's at. I'm not really sure. But he was compelled to write a check for a thousand dollars, which was the amount of that deductible payment.

So here on the very day that my mind goes, oh, geez, how in the world? God goes, like this. And it shows right up. The Zwingke's last bit that they needed was given through a kind of a stranger, a person that they met in recent times who anonymously didn't want his name to be known, filled the gap for them in this last week.

Their original goal was to leave on August 1st and that money came in on August 1st. Just incredible to see the way in which God provided. As I said, we were with the Zwingke's and rejoicing with them.

[19:45] They fairly quickly put up on Facebook that they were 100% funded and the responses began to just pour in. We were at Alex and Lizzie's wedding yesterday and we had to get going so we went up to say hi to them and bye to them as well.

And the first thing that Alex and Lizzie said was, it's their wedding day and they said, we're so excited that you got 100% funded. Just the rejoicing around that thing happened was incredibly special and what they shared with us is that their prayer has been through this entire process that their faith would be increased, that their children's faith would be increased and that the church's faith would be increased.

And I don't know, I can't speak for everybody here, but I can certainly say that that has been true for me. Hebrews 11.1, the writer of Hebrews says, the faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

So he says that faith is an assurance and it is a conviction. It's not a vague hope grounded in wishful thinking, but rather it's a settled confidence that God will do what God said He will do.

And He has promised to provide for our need. And so we can trust Him in that. And certainly, we can raise a stone of remembrance for this moment to remember.

[21 : 11] Remember the way that the Lord provided for the Zwingke's. Remember the way that He used us, that He gave to us to meet our living needs and that we had an abundance that we could give to them.

God is faithful to the things He had said He will do. In front of your bulletin, I've got a quote from John Calvin. And I'm going to close with that.

He wrote, we should ask God to increase our faith when it is small. Awaken it when it is dormant. Confirm it when it is wavering.

Strengthen it when it is weak. And raise it up when it is overthrown. Let's pray together.