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# Redeeming Time: Deuteronomy 8:11-18

## *Dedication of Crucifixes*

Dean O. Wenthe

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with each of you. Amen.

There are three pivotal words which run like a steady stream through Deuteronomy: שָׁמַע—to hear, שָׁמַר—to keep, and זָכַר—to remember. All three verbs map the relationship of God to His chosen people and are intimately intertwined. One cannot, from the perspective of Moses, do one of these and not the other two.

The lesson just read underscores the constant need for God's people "to remember the Lord your God." "Remember," how crucial it is for God's people *then* and *now*. It is *crucial*, yes *critical*, for you and for me. Why? Because we live in an epoch that has elevated amnesia to an art form: how practiced we are at forgetting! We forget the history of human cruelty and failures. We forget that every human endeavor, every empire, has fallen into the dust. We forget the reality that time will discard the rich, the famous, and the powerful as swiftly as the unknown. An old popular ballad laments: "Time, time, time . . . look what's become of me as I look around at my possibilities . . ."

One of your great callings, dear seminarians, is to redeem "time" for our age – to declare its meaning and significance. In a time like ours, the masses live as if there were only the present. So those marriage vows, they're gone – after all, he and she are both different now than they were then. So too, those promises to friends, to children, they're gone. And dare we confess, many confirmation vows for life hardly last weeks. The subliminal and public signal over and over is "here today, gone tomorrow"; *carpe diem*, "seize the day, the now," for that is all there is. And in such thought, human beings are reduced to the immediate and impulsive, to the deceitful and the destructive.

No, you are called to announce a different view of time. You are called to say "the soul that sinneth, it will die." The Lenten season places before each of us that truth: "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"; "dust thou art, and to dust you will return!" And in this confession we are located in time, God's time. We are taken to Eden where our past is expounded. We are taken to our own birth from Adam and Eve's seed. Here is our

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*Dr. Dean O. Wenthe is President of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Professor of Exegetical Theology.*

past truthfully and fully placed before us. The lies are gone. Lent lays before us the truth of our decaying epoch shrouded in death.

Genesis 5 and 11 speak to us the litanies of death that have marked every generation after the fall. "And he died" envelopes the Bill Gates as well as the unknown with complete impartiality because of that primeval rebellion. Lent lays this before us directly and forcefully. We need to hear this past.

But as you survey the book of Deuteronomy, the verbs "*listen, keep, remember*" are deeply embedded in another history—the past written by God's mercy and gracious presence with His people. The first four chapters relate, in detail, how God had come and chosen and redeemed His people. Indeed, just before our text is that brilliant passage describing God's love for a sinful and fallen people:

The Lord has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession. The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery from the power of Pharaoh King of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:6b-8)

This is what Israel was called *to remember*: the gracious character of their God. How much more shouldn't *we remember*? To remember the living God involves the past, present, and future. To remember the character of the true God is to announce His saving deeds. And as our feet turn toward Jerusalem, heavy with the weight of our sin, our souls are captive to the mystery and depth and wonder and cost of God's love. Here is the woman's seed, Abraham's seed, David's seed, God's own Son, the Paschal Lamb bearing the sin and death and lies and rebellion of all time in His body. The floods of our baptismal water delivered us from a master more tyrannical than Pharaoh. The words that we have heard, "thy sins be forgiven thee"; the meal that we have received, "this is My body, this is My blood"; we *remember* gladly and gratefully, for these are our very life. Without them our time is emptied of meaning, but *in Him* we live now and forever.

And, if there is an image that summarizes our past, present, and future, it is the crucifix. Under Pontius Pilate, a fully human and fully divine

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified for all and, for all time, has filled our time with God's gracious presence. How fitting for us to ponder and to pray and to teach and live under this image: God's Son sacrificed for us.

As we dedicate these crucifixes for our classrooms, may we hear, may we keep, but especially may we remember the height and depth and breadth of God's love for us in Christ, the Crucified Paschal Lamb.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.