

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: Be Thou My Vision**

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### **Scripture:**

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#### **Deuteronomy 8:2-16**

<sup>2</sup> Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. <sup>3</sup> He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

<sup>6</sup> Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. <sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; <sup>8</sup> a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; <sup>9</sup> a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

<sup>10</sup> When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. <sup>11</sup> Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. <sup>12</sup> Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>15</sup> He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. <sup>16</sup> He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.

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**Transcript:**

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The scripture says, "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you, nor your ancestor had known, to teach you that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during those 40 years. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with brooks and streams and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey, a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing." So Holy Spirit, use these next few minutes to help us understand these words and apply them to our life, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we're starting a new sermon series called Be Thou My Vision: Following God's Leading in Uncertain Times. Is there anyone here who feels like we are not living in uncertain times? Just raise your hand so that we can make fun of you. It's just really uncertain times and you know the list, pandemic and inflation and political division, and today is September 11th and all the memories that brings up. Then this week, I've been sad because of Queen Elizabeth's death. I know the Royal family, there's all kinds of controversy and all that, but she's just been there so long, it's destabilizing. She had already been Queen for years before I was even born. Winston Churchill was her first Prime Minister. That's just crazy. She was a World War II vet. That is a cool thing for a Queen to be. That is rockstar status Queen. At 21, she promised that her life, whether their long or short would be dedicated to serving her people. She kept that promise all the way down to two days before she died meeting with the new prime minister.

In a world where so many people do not keep their commitments, she was this remarkable leader and symbol of stability and everything now just seems off and weird, like everything. I was thinking this week, even something like a James Bond movie. I'm sorry, his Majesty's secret service. No, I don't accept it. Her majesty, Monarchs should be Queens. That's how it is. Kings are just medieval. Everything feels uncertain. So how do we not just survive through that, but thrive as we follow God's leading in uncertain times? How do we thrive both in our personal lives and corporately together as a church? Well, that's what the Israelites were dealing with in the passage I just read. Through Moses, God had gotten them out of slavery in Egypt and divided the Red Sea so that they could escape and he brought them to the edge of the promised land. Then they got scared and they panicked and they said, "The people in the land, they're giants. We can't do it. We're afraid." They complained and whined, and so God made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years until all the whiners died.

Now here we are, he has brought them again after 40 years in the wilderness to the edge of the promised land. In order to put courage into them so that this time they actually go into the promised land, Moses gives them a very long sermon called the Book of Deuteronomy. It's like a

26-hour sermon, so settle down. Okay. We're just going to go for it. All right? Tomorrow morning, it'll be great. There is one word he says over and over and over, "Remember." Remember what God has done. The way we get courage to follow God's leading in uncertain times is to remember a couple of things. First, remember who it was that led us in the past. Moses says, "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years." It wasn't Moses that led them, it was God that led them. One of the ways we find confidence in uncertain times is to remember that it is always God who is leading us, not our jobs, not our popularity, not our grades, not our money, not our physical appearance.

Any of the things we rely on for security, those things fail in uncertain times. In fact, that's why the times are uncertain, because the things we've relied on suddenly aren't reliable anymore. The grades didn't give us what we needed or wanted or the inflation eats away at our savings or whatever it is. But when we remember that it was God who led us in the past, it gives us confidence to follow his leading into the future because the same God that divided the Red Sea and raised Jesus from the dead is the same God that is guiding us still. Now you might be thinking, "Well, I can't think of a time God has led me in the past, through a hard thing in the past. What about that?" Well, that's a great question. I'll answer that in a minute. Remember who has led us. Second, remember what he has led us through. Moses says, "He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land with its venomous snakes and scorpions."

Okay. This was not a Disney Cruise. This was 40 years in a dangerous wilderness, snakes, scorpions and no water, but God led them through it. Moses says, "Your clothes did not wear out. He brought you water out of a hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness." The reason Moses reminds them how terrible it is because when we face new problems, new challenges, new difficulties, it's really easy for us to start to think, "Well, yeah. Sure. God helped me back then, but man, this thing is different. This one's bigger. This one, I just don't see how God's going to help me now." Well, the only reason that we think that is because the thing we got through back then doesn't seem like a big thing anymore. You know why? because we got through it. Don't minimize what God has done for you in the past. Don't shrink it. Don't explain it away. Remember how hard it was and God got you through it, and how, even in the middle of it, there were good things.

Even in the middle of the wilderness, they got to see the Red Sea divide in two. They got to see water from a rock, that's good things. If you are in a wilderness right now, look for the good things God is doing in the middle of it as he leads you out of it. We're living in a time where people love to say things like, "It's never been this bad before. This pandemic is unprecedented." No it isn't. We got through one in the 1920s. It took a couple of years, but we got through it. "We've never been this divided as a country before." Excuse me, we had a Civil War, that's pretty divided. Election of 1800, pretty divided. It has been 218 years since a sitting vice president has killed a former secretary of the treasury, that's a good run; 1968, all those riots. When we remember how bad it was and we got through it gives us courage that God will guide us out of it today.

Remember who has led us, what he led us through and finally, remember why he led us through it, because as important as it is to remember the past, what God has done in the past. There's also danger, there's a danger if we get stuck in the past. In the Bible, whenever God did something amazing people would pile up a little pile of stones. It was called an Ebenezer or standing stones. The reason they did it is every time they walked past that mountain of stones, they would be reminded of how God was faithful to them in the past, how God got them through something difficult in the past. It was a reminder. Over and over in the Bible. God says, "Remember, remember, remember," but, and this is super important so if your minds are wandering, bring those ponies back into the barn, because it's the point of the sermon. We don't look back to get stuck in the past, we look back to God's faithfulness in the past to find courage, to follow his lead into a brave new future.

After telling the Israelites to remember the past, Moses then looks to the future and he says, "The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with brooks, streams and deep springs, a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey." He tells them to look back, not so they can get stuck in the past and repeat the mistake of the previous generation and not go into the promise land, he tells them to look back so that they actually move into their future this time into the promised land. It's a good land with lots of good stuff, wheat, barley, all kinds of things, all kinds of things. See, as important as remembering is we can take away some wrong lessons from the past if we're not careful. For the last year, my wife and I have been trying to plan a trip to Europe so that she can do some research for a new book series that she's writing and also, as an empty nest trip. So far, we have rescheduled that trip twice because of COVID stuff and stuff at the church.

Now, our oldest daughter has invited herself to come along with us, so it's not an empty nest trip anymore. It is now currently scheduled for October; however, the last couple of weeks we've had this terrible thought that maybe we need to reschedule it again, because what if this is the year the Mariners go to the playoffs? After decades of faithfully following the Mariners through all their lows and all their lows, it would just be terrible to miss the playoffs at this point. It didn't occur to us, it just didn't even occur to us, "Don't schedule that trip for October because the Mariners might be in the playoffs," because why would it? Nothing in the past would indicate that was ever a threat. See, we can take some wrong lessons from the past if we get stuck there. As it was then, it will always be now. Mariners will never go to the playoffs. What worked then will work now. Not necessarily what got you here doesn't always get you there.

We look back and we celebrate the past, and it's normal and fine to even feel nostalgic about the past and miss things from the past. I do this all the time, but we can miss things from the past, be nostalgic and also move into the future God has for us. Sometimes I'll think back to when Christina and I were first married and I'll go, "Oh, we didn't have kids. I wasn't in ministry." Then I'm like, "Oh, it's so wonderful. We had so much fun. It was so easy, if only I could go back," but then, I wouldn't have my kids. Then I wouldn't know this church that I love and you, who I love those things wouldn't have happened. We look back to gain confidence to

move into our future. So practically speaking, how do we put this into practice? One action step for this week, in prayer, ask God to show you his faithfulness to you in the past and make a list of all the times and pray over that list and thank God for that list.

Then, tell those stories to other people, because those are the times that give us courage in uncertain times to move into our future. Go back to those moments in your mind again and again and again and again, that was the purpose of the standing stones so that every time a person passed that stone they'd remember God's faithfulness in the past. If you don't feel like you can think of a time God got you through a hard time in the past, maybe you're a new Christian or young or whatever, first of all, maybe you do have a time, you just don't know it. You just forgot it or didn't recognize it. But if you really can't think of a time, God has led you in the past thru a hard thing, then you know what? You're in the middle of your first story right now. Whatever you're going through right now is going to be the first story you have on your list of how God led you through something difficult, this will be the first story. I claim that for you in Jesus' name.

I have a lot of moments in my past that I go back to again and again and again to remind me of God's faithfulness. There's one in particular that I told you about years and years ago, it's been just years. Some of you may remember, a lot of you probably don't, but there's a second part to this story that I've never told you. It was the first night that I had moved to the Bay Area and I was in the middle of a painful divorce, and I'd moved into graduate student housing and met my roommate. When he found out that I was there to do graduate work at Stanford in English literature, he said, "Literature? What a stupid thing to study." I remember thinking, "Great. I used to live with my wife and now I live with you. Yay, me." So then I tried to cook some dinner, but ended up cutting my finger on a can of soup and I remember standing in the kitchen looking at my bleeding finger thinking, "This is a metaphor for my life. I'm hemorrhaging."

I got in the car to find a store to buy a bandaid, but it was my first night in the Bay Area. This is pre-cell phone, no Google Maps. I got completely lost and finally, I saw a phone booth. If you're too young to know where a phone booth is, Google it when you get home. I pulled over to call my soon-to-be ex-wife and she wasn't home. I got back in the car and by this time I was crying, I was yelling at God, "Where are you? You're not helping. What good are you?" About every 45 minutes, I would stop at a phone booth to try to call my soon-to-be ex, but every time I called she wasn't there. Finally, I stopped at one last phone booth. It was around midnight and I called my parents and I was crying and my parents were freaking out. It's midnight, their son calls them from some phone booth crying. They tried to calm me down. It didn't really work. My mom said some mean things about my ex, which were sort of helpful, but not very holy.

I was crying, freaking out my mom finally said, "Would you just go home?" I said, "Mom, I don't know where home is anymore." She said, "Just figure it out, go home," so I did. I hung up the phone and figured out my way home. As I stepped out of that phone booth, I said to God, "You are so not here for me. when I need you the most, you just are AWOL, absent." Worst night of my life and the best night of my life, because the last phone booth where I called my parents from was outside Menlo Park Church. That Sunday, I thought, "Hey, that phone booth

was outside of a church." So I went and I kept going, and a few years later I volunteered to do college ministry there. Then a few years after that, I became the college pastor and I discovered gifts I didn't know I had. I made friends that are still with me today. That church helped to bring Christina and me together. It trained me in ministry so that eventually I could come here.

When I stepped out of that phone booth, I was only 100 yards from the pulpit that I would one day preach in, all stuff that I couldn't see at the time. So when I said to God, "You are so not here for me." God was looking at me and saying, "Oh, if you could only see the next 11 years. I am going to rebuild your entire life right here. You are not lost. I know exactly where you are. I have never been closer. You are standing in the middle of my hope. You just can't see it right now." Now here's the part I haven't told you. I forgot all about that night in that phone booth. I did not remember, which is the topic of this sermon, I did not remember the past. I forgot all about it until years later when I was the college pastor there and I was working on a sermon on hope and I was stuck for a sermon illustration.

So I called my dad just to take a break, and we talked for a while and then finally I said, "I got to go, dad. I got to try to finish this sermon." My dad said, "Okay, you have come a long way from that night in that phone booth." I said, "What night? What phone booth?" He said, "Don't you remember? You called us crying from some phone booth." He said, "By the way, where was that phone booth?" I said, "Oh, dad, I got to go. I just found my sermon illustration on hope." I'd forgotten about it then, but now I go back to that moment again and again, and again. It is my chief standing stone moment of my life, and it reminds me of God's faithfulness in the past, which gives me confidence to face the future. What are those standing stones for you? If nothing comes to mind, maybe you have one, you just forgot it like I did, or if you can't think of one, you're in the middle of a standing stone moment right now, and God's going to lead you through it.

That's true for us individually, and it is true for us corporately as a church. God has faithfully led this church for 67 years, and I have told you the stories many, many times, because they are our standing stone stories. I'm going to tell you one more time, whether you like it or not, founded in 1955, when Bellevue only had one stoplight and powerful Presbyterian poobah said, "Why would anyone go to church in Bellevue when they can go to church in Seattle?" But God led a group of faith-filled people who knew that the east side was going to grow and there needed to be a church here to reach out to the people that were going to be moving here, so they started meeting in a funeral home, which is creepy. The choir rehearsed in the coffin room, which is even creepier. The choir director would come in and say, "Boy, it's really dead around here," probably the first dad joke ever. God led some folks to start a coffee shop to reach out to drug addicts in the '60s and '70s to show them Jesus' love.

God led a group of retired people to go to Guatemala and partner with a village there until it was economically self-sustaining. God led us to start Jubilee Reach, which helps under-resourced people in our community. God led us to build the Center for Champions in Rwanda, which has

helped over a 1,000 street kids get vocational training, get off the streets, get into jobs and discover Jesus in the process. A few years ago, God brought us New Hope Revival, this wonderful African community that has enriched our lives so much. God continues to lead us right down to two months ago when I went with a few people from our church to Congo where there's a lot of ethnic violence, genocide, and many of you have given generously to provide food for the people there as well as to fund reconciliation work there. We were able to meet some of the kids that we as a church helped to feed. They were wearing these tee-shirts with our logo there and our name there because they are so grateful for what's happening.

One of the things visitors do there apparently, so they told me, is milk a cow. It's this ceremonial thing, so they gave me a special hat and a cow to milk. They were all curious to see if the American city boy could milk a cow. What they did not know is that my grandparents were farmers and I have milked cows before. What I did not know is that African cows are different and a lot harder to milk; however, I managed and here's the picture, I managed to adequately milk the cow and get some milk and all of that. There's a video of this and it went viral to Congolese communities all over the U.S. and all over the world of me milking this cow. They just started sending it to each other, and Pastor Alexis has gotten calls from all over the U.S. and all over the world from Congolese people who saw this video saying, "This just gives me hope, because nobody is paying attention to this genocide that's happening."

So the fact that an American church sent people, given all the dangers, all the violence; in fact, there were killings just a few days after we left, the fact that we went in spite of that, it meant so much to them. BelPres, God has done all of that through your faithfulness. None of those things were easy. There was plenty of disagreement and argument and differences of opinion on every single one of those things, that's fine. Disagreement is part of how we figure out where God is leading us. There are some reoccurring themes over the years in our church, discipleship, reaching out to people that are moving here, family, children, and youth, and supporting them. Where God has led us is often a good indicator of where God is going to lead us in the future. For 67 years, God has led this church through all kinds of turbulent times, the '60s and all the divisions then. The economic crises of the '70s and 2008, God has led us from strength to strength to strength, and he is not about to stop now.

I know, I know it has been a hard couple of years in our world, in our country, in our families, in every church, not just our church, every single church, including ours, but BelPres, I see beautiful things ahead for us as individuals and corporately for us as a church. Next week, I'll talk about some of the ways God is leading us to extend what he's already been doing into the future. But for this week, remember God's faithfulness to you personally and corporately as a church because BelPres, I see beautiful things ahead. So have hope and take courage and be joyful, because in the words of one of my favorite hymns, "Our God doth undertake to guide the future as he has the past. Our hope, our confidence, let nothing shake. All now, mysterious will be bright at last. Be still, my soul, the waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below." Jesus, you have led us from strength of strength. You have been there in our darkest times. You have always been good, Jesus. You have always been good to us and your

goodness is still running after us. Lord, help us to be confident in that so that we can confidently move into the future that you are leading us toward. We ask this in your name, Jesus, amen.

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**Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

1. What are moments in your life where you have seen God's faithfulness to you in the past?
2. In what ways do those moments encourage you to step into the future?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.