

Short Term Memory Loss

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. Father in heaven, we pray that as we hear your word, we would be able to taste and see that you are good and that we might take refuge in you.

We pray, Father, that your word would be a living word to us by the power of your Holy Spirit and that our minds and our ears would be obedient to you through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Please be seated. Amen. Well, we're continuing on in the book of Exodus and we're beginning on chapter 15, verse 22 today in this passage.

It's on page 61. It's a great title. It's called Short-Term Memory Loss. And Terry asked me earlier in the week if that sermon was about him. And I didn't think so until the second hymn today.

But, and it's not about David. It's not David's short-term memory loss either. It's about all of us. And it's a passage that tells us of the danger of forgetting who God is and his grace to us.

[1 : 12] And so it's a helpful title. And to be honest with you, David chose it back in September. But until Thursday, I had forgotten that. And today I realized, you know, this is the direction this has got to go.

But last Sunday, we talked a little bit about this. We had Remembrance Day. And of course, Remembrance Day is a vital day in the life of Canada.

It's a day in which we remember those who have sacrificed their lives for the sake of the country. Our identity is really caught up in that day. It's a day that keeps us from forgetting, which we are very prone to.

Now, as God's people, we have an even more important work of not forgetting. It's crucial that we remember.

It's crucial that we know the grace of God because our spiritual lives are such that we are prone to forget. And that's why regularly we take part in Holy Communion.

[2 : 15] In it, we hear Jesus' words, to do this in remembrance of me. And we don't just remember an event in communion. It is a testimony that Jesus has died as the one perfect sufficient sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

And that he has risen. And now is our Lord who makes clean our sinful bodies by his body. And he washes our souls through his most precious blood.

This is the gospel. This is God transforming us by his power. It's what we trust Jesus for. And if we forget it, we actually lose our identity.

We lose our hope. We lose our life. And so this passage today is a great gift for us. Because it shows God's people falling into spiritual forgetfulness three times.

And in each case, God reminds them and us who he is and how to guard against forgetfulness.

Now in the Bible, we basically see two crises that happen in people's lives.

[3 : 24] In the lives of the people of God that cause forgetfulness. One is wealth and plenty. And Moses warns them of this just before they go in the promised land.

And the other is difficulty and hardship. Unmet needs in our lives. That's what this passage is about. It's about fundamental needs.

Food and water being unmet. There is a lacking. And if you look at verse 22, it's only three days after the escape through the Red Sea.

And Israel found no water. They come to Marah and see water, which makes them all the more thirsty. And of course it's bitter. There's no way they can drink it.

And their response in verse 24 is important. It says there that the people murmured against Moses. And that word murmur is repeated ten times in our passage.

[4 : 25] It is an important word. It is a word of spiritual forgetfulness. And it is a complaining about Moses. It means grumbling. It means doubting him.

And in the end, doubting God. And it's a huge contrast, isn't it, with the song of Moses that all of Israel sang just three days before. If your short-term memory is good, you'll remember what that song was.

Neil preached on it last week. And it says, Commitment to praise God in their lives.

It's a great expression of trust in God and rejoicing in him. But of course we see here the very opposite. People are murmuring because, humanly speaking, their situation is hopeless.

And there's no hint of praise to God. In an incredibly short time, Israel has stopped trusting in God. And they have begun doubting God's leader. It's an expression of deep forgetfulness that really involves walking by sight rather than walking by faith.

[5 : 42] And I think that for us as a congregation, there's a warning here for us. Probably many of us in our lives have faced bitter waters.

You might be facing it right now. You come up to a place where your hopes are placed and find that it is a bitter outcome. We lose things in our lives.

We experience illness, broken relationships, death in our families. We experience deep emotional pain. There is uncertainty about our future.

These are times when we see no real hope, humanly speaking. And they are hard to deal with. And the Bible tells us in this passage that there are two ways to approach and go through these times of difficulty.

We can become bitter ourselves. And the murmuring starts against each other and against God. Or we can remember His grace.

[6 : 43] We can look for His goodness and His mercy in our lives. And I find that this passage is very helpful for us. Because there are three ways that help us, especially in times of great need, to remember the goodness of God.

And I want to look at the first one in verse 25. Because in the midst of all this murmuring, Moses makes the faithful response in verse 25.

At the end, he says, He cried to the Lord. Very simply, he cried to the Lord. It's an expression of earnest prayer. It's the opposite of forgetfulness.

It's turning with your whole being to the one who alone can help. In the one alone who can give hope. And he is saying, We need you, God.

And that prayer of faith is echoed in chapter 17. It's the third example of what happens with forgetfulness. And it has to do with water again. And there, there's a serious rebellion by the people.

[7 : 47] Who again walk by sight and not by faith. They're desperately thirsty. And they make the claim that God is not with us. He can't be here. It's too bitter.

It's too difficult. There's nothing for us. And Moses cries out to the Lord in verse 4 of chapter 17. What shall I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.

Very heartfelt prayer in response to a hopeless looking situation. But I want you to notice that both those prayers are clear expressions of hoping in God where there is no human hope.

It's completely beyond Moses' ability as a leader to do anything for his people. But he knows the one who is strong to save. He sang about that.

God is our strength. He is our salvation. He is the living God who hears the prayers of his people. That's what's behind Moses' cry. It is a prayer of remembering who God is.

[8 : 45] And I think that here at St. John's, God is teaching us to be that kind of people who pray in the way that Moses prayed. This is a work that God is growing here at St. John's.

And it's important because when you and I pray, we are reminded that all of us are dependent on God in everything. No matter how successful or unsuccessful things are in our lives.

No matter how healthy or sick. No matter how happy or sad we are. Prayer is integral to our life because it shows our need for God. And that's why prayer is integral to all our ministries.

It's central in our Sunday services and we all have prayer time during the Sunday, the communion. We pray for each other and for ourselves. We see it in our pastoral care ministries, in Bible studies, living waters.

And even in our church committee meetings, you should know that a couple of years ago when we had a deficit, one of the things that God taught us through that is that we need to pray. And so every church committee meeting right in the middle, no matter how far we are on the agenda, we pray for ten minutes.

[9 : 57] Pray for the life of the church. Pray for God's guidance and his provision. It is an expression of remembrance to God. And you know there is a purpose.

God's response to prayer is powerful. You see Moses throw a tree into the water. The bitter water turns sweet. And same with him striking the rock in that third episode.

He struck a rock and out of nothing, fresh water came, life-giving water came. And you know the purpose for that water is not just to satiate the thirst of God's people.

It is to reveal God's grace. It is to reveal his truth. It is to remind the people very powerfully. And that brings us to the second way of remembering.

Not only is it through prayer, but it is through hearing and obeying God's word. So look at the end of verse 25. Right after the miracle takes place, it says, There the Lord made for them a statute and an ordinance.

[11 : 06] And there he proved them. He tested them. He formed who they are. Saying, If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give heed to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon you, which I put upon the Egyptians.

For I am the Lord your healer. This is a wonderful passage, a critical passage for us, this verse. Because God reveals the antidote to forgetfulness. He calls them to listen diligently to God's voice, and to obey it.

And this is what we were made for. I don't know if you noticed, but Dave and I have these groovy new microphone systems, where you look like you're live on stage or something.

And we're struggling a little bit with keeping them on there, on our ears. David thinks that his ear was not designed to carry one of these. His ear is unique and different.

[12 : 12] Not for this particular sound system. But Oz has assured us that's not the case. And I want to tell you that we were designed for God's sound system.

We were designed to hear and obey God's word. And in that way, to know the goodness of God. To know his wholeness and his healing. God is teaching Israel that as they hear and obey, they will know the blessings of God.

And he will bring that wholeness. That it's not just a healing of the water. It is a healing of their souls and their bodies and their minds. It's God revealing himself.

And in fact, the word healing has to do with the completeness of one's physical body, their emotional being, and their moral self as well. And this points directly to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Healing is prominent in Jesus' ministry because it is a sign that Jesus is God the healer. And here in the Old Testament, here's the first place where we hear that God very clearly is the healer.

[13 : 24] And Jesus reveals that that's who he is. That he transforms lives by his good news. That's why Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. Why?

Because it is the power of God for salvation, for healing, for wholeness, to everyone who believes. This is the work that he is doing in you.

It's the work that he is doing in me because of Jesus Christ. And it's revealed first here in Exodus. The amazing thing about our passage is that God reveals that he is the healer in response to complaining.

It's not in response to their righteous deeds or their great prayers and so forth. It is in response to their complaining. And instead of punishing the people for forgetting that he is the one who has saved them, he pours grace on them.

This doesn't make sense. He teaches them that the way to respond to grace is to hear his voice and obey and to live a life of thankfulness. And we, in our human nature, often get this wrong.

[14 : 31] We figure that if we are good people, if we do the right thing, we will have faith and God is going to give us grace. But of course, God is showing that he reveals his grace first and reveals himself as the healer so that we can know him and clearly do what he teaches.

And I want to go a little further in Exodus 16 because the depth of God's grace revealed is really shown here. It's about a month after this episode.

Israel gets very hungry in the wilderness of sin. It's a very appropriate name because they are going to sin big time here. In verse 2, the whole congregation, it says, of the people of Israel murmured, there's that word again, against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

And they say blasphemous things. Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the flesh pots and ate bread to the full.

Now that's a distorted memory. It's not just a short-term memory. They have turned things completely wrong. They make Egypt sound like Club Med.

[15:44] You know, here was a place where we had our leisure. We had everything we wanted to eat. Flesh pots were great. And worse, they said that we'd rather have Pharaoh as Lord than God as our Savior.

It's a shocking thing to say. But you know, we as Christians can fall into this. It's very easy for us to look at the life outside the Christian life and to say, that's pretty good there.

Those flesh pots are great. It's a place where I should find my true satisfaction. But of course, that is a sign of spiritual forgetfulness.

It is a sign that we do not see God's grace clearly. But what does God say to the Israelites as they test and question God?

You know, does God say I'm going to rain down fire and brimstone for talking in such a profane way? No. Verse 4, look at this.

[16:42] He says, I will rain bread from heaven for you. It's a remarkable response. I'm going to rain grace on you, God is saying.

It's the very opposite of the way that Pharaoh would respond to complaining. And God does this by sending flocks of quail in a barren place. He does it by sending manna from heaven, bread that tastes like honey.

And notice in verse 4 that there's another reason for this grace. It's the same as that we've heard. It tests and forms them into obedience to God's word.

And that's why it says, you should only gather a day's portion every day that I may prove them, I may test the people whether they will walk in my law or not.

You see, he is saying to the people there that he will form them through that grace. Every day when they pick up the manna, every day when they get fresh meat through the quail, they will remember that it comes from God's hand.

[17:47] It only can come from him because there's no life in that desert. It is a day of remembrance each day that they would remember that God alone provides.

That's the marvel of that miracle. That miracle teaches a spiritual truth that God is the source of all our life and we are meant to walk in his ways every day.

And you know, in Deuteronomy 8, Moses explains, looking back, what happened on this day. He says, on that day, God humbled you and he caused you to hunger and then feeding you with manna to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

And you know that sounds familiar because Jesus quoted those words in the wilderness to Satan when Satan was tempting him. These are the faithful words of the Son of God. It is saying that we, as the people of God, will find it essential to live by God's word, that we feed on it every day, that we remember our need for him and be guided by him.

And so that's the second way of remembering, to hear God's word and to obey it, to feed on it. And that brings us to the third way. Besides prayer and feeding on God's word, God's people are called to a Sabbath.

[19:09] And this is a very interesting thing. Look at verse 29. You have to turn the page and at the bottom of page 62, we see that with this manna and the quails.

It says, See, the Lord has given you the Sabbath. Therefore, on the sixth day, he gives you bread for two days. Remain everyone in their own place. Let no one go out of the place on the seventh day.

So the people rested on the seventh day. Now this is not a day of inactivity. It's not a day in which the people just lounge around trying to figure out how to while away the hours.

In the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, we hear the reason for the Sabbath being given on that day. It says this, The seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it you should not do any work. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

[20:10] So you see, the day of Sabbath is a day of rejoicing. It is a day of enjoying God and His salvation and of remembering it very, very clearly.

And you remember it together and in one's home. The Gifford family is a moving house in a week and a half, exactly, and we are moving to a duplex, a half duplex.

The other half of the duplex is owned by a Jewish family and they're a very friendly family and they came over and explained what they were all about. They said, we won't answer the phone from Friday night until Saturday night.

He said, but you know what? We'd love to have you over. We have all kinds of people over. It's a very active day in our house and we just enjoy people in our home. You know, I think that we need to renew the meaning of Sabbath.

On Sunday, that is what we are doing. We are gathering together and rejoicing in what God has done for us together. Our Sunday is a day of remembering the saving work of Jesus and rejoicing and that's a good start.

[21 : 18] It's vital for us to have a whole day that we push out busyness and take in instead those things that remind us of God's saving work. That we are able to in some way enjoy God and His salvation and enjoy the people that He has saved as well.

We strengthen and renew our relationships with others who have been saved and find ways to rejoice and that's a pattern for us in the week that happens as well throughout the week to intentionally carve out smaller pieces of time to remember God's saving work.

Whether it's through prayer or Bible study meeting together it's the remembrance of what God has given to us in grace and a foretaste of heaven as well.

And that's a time of really remembering and being renewed in our life. So I want to close by just briefly saying that this passage answers a question that has certainly come up in my mind probably yours as well.

Why does God take a people and not take the fastest route to the promised land? It would only take a couple weeks to walk and yet they go through the most inhospitable land in the world for 40 years wandering around.

[22 : 34] What is the point? Well what we see in this passage is that God is taking his people to the school of the wilderness and he is teaching them that by their hardship and even through their complaining he alone sustains them.

He alone is worthy of their trust. He alone has the words of life and of healing. again he alone is worthy to be trusted and they are taught that lesson over and over again.

And we as a congregation of St. John's may be attending this school in months to come. We may also find in our personal lives times of bitterness and hardship and in this time we need to look for God's grace because God is with us as he told the people at the rock.

he is with us. He is one who alone saves us who teaches us in those times particularly to trust him as a congregation to trust him as individuals.

And God promises to teach promises that Jesus alone saves us and that's why Jesus talks about manna in John and he says this truly truly I say to you it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven but my father gives you the true bread from heaven for the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

[24 : 07] They said to him sir give us this bread always. Jesus said to them I am the bread of life whoever comes to me shall never hunger whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Those are words of truth those are words of remembrance that is the grace of the gospel that in Jesus we find our hope and our trust in our life.

There is no hardship or uncertainty that can make us forget this because Exodus assures us that God will teach us to trust him through these times as we obey the gospel of grace turn to God our Savior in prayer and rejoice in the salvation that Jesus has brought us.

Amen. Amen.