

The God Who Reminds

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[0 : 00] So these instructions that God is giving Israel are helping them to remember the Exodus. Helping them to remember what God has done.

You see that word remember over and over again. But even in verse 3, remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery. And he goes on to tell the story in very short form of what happened in the Exodus.

And later on it says, when your son asks you, why do you do this? And there's another opportunity to remember, to tell the story of what happened in the Exodus. So as we dig into this passage, we want to look at remembering.

We want to look at what is God calling us to remember. And then see in how he's calling Israel to remember, to see how are we supposed to remember. And then we're going to step a little bit outside of the passage and look at why to remember.

Okay, this seems straightforward enough. What do we remember? How do we remember? And why do we remember? What do we remember? In our passage this morning, God gives Israel two different ceremonies, two different celebrations, that he wants them to use to remember how God delivered them out of the nation of Egypt.

[1 : 11] The first is what we call the consecration of the firstborn. The consecration of the firstborn. And this, of course, reflects the passage that Dave talked about last week, if you were here, on the final plague that God struck Egypt with, that took the lives of the firstborn of every man and beast in Egypt.

Now, as you know, that plague didn't affect Israel. And why was that? I told you this would be a little bit more interactive. Why did that plague, the last plague in Egypt, not affect Israel?

Because of the blood of the Lamb. So it wasn't that we get this idea, and I still fall into this trap, when sometimes I look back on that plague and say, well, it didn't fall on Israel because Israel was God's people and they didn't need judgment.

But that's not true. Otherwise, they wouldn't need to have the Passover. Israel avoided judgment because something else took the judgment. The lamb that they sacrificed took that judgment.

So Israel's sin and the cost of God's rescue is still a reality. They still had to deal with that. Now, it's easy to misunderstand what God is commanding here in this consecration of the firstborn.

[2 : 22] We think consecrate. We say, well, God is somehow going to make the firstborn holy or pure in some way. But if you have the ESV, verse 2, it says, To consecrate means to give something to God.

Not just to make it pure or clean, but to give it to God. And we see what this means when they talk about the pure animals, the clean animals, what happens. What does it mean to give a clean animal to God?

It means to sacrifice it. It means to give it up on the altar of God. But God, of course, doesn't want the children to be sacrificed, but he still says that they belong to me.

The firstborn of every womb is mine. So I want you to picture that you're a new parent. For some of you, this isn't very difficult. We still have a young child, but it's our fourth.

But friends of ours just had their first baby this week. And so picture that you have just welcomed this new bundle of joy into the world. And your life is fixed with a mix of joy and terror.

[3 : 29] Do you guys remember that? That mix of joy and terror. And you look down at this baby and you're like, Oh, wow, they even look like me. Like, I can't believe that this is my baby.

This is mine. And they think, mine. I have to care for this. I can hardly care for myself. How am I supposed to care for this little infant? Does it melt into your arms? Parents, do you remember those feelings have just melted away in the sleepless nights, perhaps?

And you don't remember exactly what it's like. But I'm getting a bit off track here. I just want us to remember the pride. The pride and the joy and the humbling that you have when you hold a newborn child.

Particularly your first. Now picture that about a week after you've had this child, you're taking them to the temple. You're going to go and to sacrifice the child.

The child belongs to God. It's God's. You've seen your future in this child, and now you go to sacrifice it. I remember in the hospital looking down at this baby and thinking that my life had changed when we had our first.

[4 : 39] And it wasn't about me anymore. It was about a huge portion of my life was going to be devoted to raising this little boy. But now that baby's gone. Why? Not because of his sin, but because of mine.

That's why the baby belongs to God. Because of my sin. So what's running through my mind as I walk? I'm thinking about the huge cost, the destructive power of sin, that it would take this child.

But then I remember that God made a way. That my son belongs to God, but he can be redeemed with a sacrifice. Now that doesn't lessen the weight of the consequence and the awareness of my sin, but it does increase our recognition of God's grace.

So this consecration of the firstborn reminds us of our sin. It reminds us how we belong to God. And it also reminds us of the work that God did in the Exodus.

The second ceremony that's laid out in Exodus 13 is the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. Now of course this celebration is tied together with that whole Passover meal of the roasting of the lamb and the bitter herbs that you looked at last week.

[5 : 54] And this meal is also discussed in chapter 11. But what's interesting here in 13 is that the only part of the meal that's the feast and the celebration that's mentioned is the Feast of the Unleavened Bread and not the Passover meal.

And I think that's because God wants Israel to focus not just on the Passover, but on the other components of the meal as well in the celebration. The focus is on the Feast of the Unleavened Bread and not just the Passover.

And I think that the message of this celebration, the aspects that it brings out are often overlooked. So again, a little bit of interaction time, a little quiz time.

Are we ready for quiz time? I don't have any theme music, quiz theme music. That would have been a good idea. Maybe next time. But what is Unleavened Bread? What is it? What is Unleavened Bread? Yeah, perfect.

People were paying attention. Unleavened Bread is bread with no yeast. If you are still in high school and your mom doesn't let you in the kitchen because every food you make turns green, you'll find out what yeast is in a few years and then you'll know what Unleavened Bread is.

- [6 : 59] So what's the historical event that led to this ceremony? What's the historical event that Israel made Unleavened Bread for?
- For right before the Passover. So what was going on? Yeah, they're just ready to leave. Why did they use Unleavened Bread instead of regular bread at the Passover?
- Because it's faster. Because the bread doesn't have to rise. And so it's all about speed. But actually the issue of this isn't just about speed.
- It's why they had to be quick. The feast is to be celebrated when they are in the land. The celebration is to be celebrated when they're back, when they're in the Promised Land.
- Okay, so the original Unleavened Bread was when they were in Egypt. But now God has given them instructions to celebrate, to remember when they're in the nation of Israel. There's no place to go. They're not dressed and ready to leave.
- [7 : 56] So it's no longer just about speed, is it? They're already at their final destination. Not only that, but the regulations are pretty intense here.
- It's not just don't put yeast in your bread. It's don't have yeast, don't have leaven at all in your whole encampment, in your whole land. What's the deal here?
- Well, what's going on is that in the Exodus, Israel baked bread so that they could, they baked unleavened bread so that they could make it faster so that they could exit Egypt and go to the land that God had called them to.
- This is actually an obedience issue. This is actually following your mission, being a part of the mission that God has called you to type of issue, not just a time issue.
- Do you see that? So, because putting yeast in the bread made it take longer to make the bread, it got in the way of Israel being obedient and going on the mission that God had called them to.
- [8 : 55] So yeast became this, yeast or leaven became this symbol for disobedience or impurity that distracts us from being on the mission that God has called us to.
- And that's an image that the New Testament brings up regularly. I think that a couple weeks ago, Dave looked at a passage that talks about that in 1 Corinthians.
- And this is a powerful image because leaven is not like any other ingredient in the bread. So around this time of year, this Easter season, my mom used to make hot crust buns.
- Anybody make hot crust buns or eat them? Eat them? Okay. There's like six people. Seriously? They were everywhere when I was growing up. So I don't know if you use the same recipe, but my mom's hot crust buns had raisins in them.
- I think that's integral to the thing. And I didn't really like them. I sort of have a deep distrust of raisins because I often take raisin cookies thinking that they're chocolate chips and I'm thoroughly disappointed.
- [9 : 52] So I, yeah, me and raisins, we didn't really get along. So I didn't really like the hot crust buns because they had raisins in them. But you know what? I could pick the raisins out when I ate them. You can't hand someone bread and be like, well, you can pick the leaven out.
- It's impossible. It's all mixed in together. It doesn't work like that. You can pick the raisins out, but you can't pick the leaven out. And often we look at sin in our life like it's a raisin.
- We'll look at it and we're like, well, I know, I got to deal with that. I'll pick that out later. I'll work on that. But the thing is that sin affects everything else. A little leaven leavens the whole loaf, right?
- Even a little bit of sin affects our whole lives. And that sin distracts us from the mission that God has called us to. And so Israel is reminded of this every time that they celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread and they make that unleavened bread.

So in addition to reminding Israel of the Exodus, the Feast of Unleavened Bread reminds them both of a call to purity and a call to be on mission. Okay, do you see what these are intended to remind Israel of?

[11 : 01] So how do they do that? How are we called to remember? What does it look like from these two sets of instructions how to remember? Because as far as I know, nobody here still celebrates the consecration of the Firstborn or the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

You might do things similar, but you don't celebrate them anymore. So how, what can we learn from these two celebrations about how to remember? The first thing is that remember, remembering is communal and proclamative.

Okay, don't look up that word proclamative. It's not a real word, but I'm going to use it today. What I mean by things being communal and proclamative, English is a living language. You can just do that.

You can just invent, especially if you have a microphone, then you can really invent words. But what I mean by being communal and proclamative is that both of these celebrations are done in community and they declare, they voice, they speak about something to others.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I think about remembering, I often think of something that's done quietly and personally, just by myself. I think that's the nature of our culture.

[12 : 07] Even in something like Remembrance Day, when we gather together to remember the sacrifices of people who fought in wars on behalf of our country, we gather together and then the moment of silence is done privately and quietly.

And we think of and remember by ourselves, even when we're in a public gathering. But both of these celebrations are quite a bit different than that.

These acts of remembrance are very public. And this is particularly true of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It's meant to be done in community. And this makes a lot of sense because when others are involved and are remembering, it increases, it intensifies the ability to remember.

And it also extends the reach of who does the remembering. So as you see when you read through the various instructions of celebrating this feast and other feasts in other places in the Old Testament, you'll see that these feasts were often celebrated in front of others who weren't Israelites.

Some of them were just visitors who didn't partake in the feast. They were from other places, maybe participating in trade or something like that. But others were not Israelite by blood, but they have become Israelites.

[13 : 21] They have decided to follow the God of Israel along with them. And these feasts worked as a way to catechize, to teach them about who God was and what God had done on behalf of Israel and what He was doing in the world.

Others would celebrate with the people even when they weren't a part of Israel. And these feasts and the consecration of the firstborn were done in public so that others would learn about God. And this is even clearer for the young Israelites.

Both of these celebrations were used to teach the children about the Exodus story and about the character of God and what God had accomplished. So if you look at verse 8, it says, You shall tell your son on that day.

What day? The day that you celebrate the unleavened bread. It is because of what the Lord has done for me when I came out of Egypt. And he goes on to tell about what is remembered by the Feast of the Unleavened Bread.

And that happens, that comes up again in verse 14 as well when the son asks, Why do we remember this? And the parents have an opportunity to teach. So these are, remembering is done communally and proclamatively, another invented word, so that we can both intensify our remembering with others but also extend who gets to remember to others who are around us and to those who are in our families, particularly our children.

[14 : 44] Remembering is also experiential and tactile because being merely communal and proclamative, remembering does not necessarily pass on the knowledge of God.

But we see here that remembering is both communal or is experiential and tactile as well. So by that, I mean that the tradition helps Israel to not only remember the Exodus but remember how the Exodus felt to actually feel the Exodus.

So if you look at verse 8, again, it says, You shall tell your son on that day, It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt. And it shall be to you a sign on your hand and a memorial between your eyes.

And he goes on and later on, again, we pick up this first person language, I, me. And of course, the people that God is speaking to here really did feel the Exodus but the way that's written is that that first person answer is supposed to be the answer that people give whether they were actually present at the first events or not.

Because we are, in our remembering, it becomes so real and so experiential that we have felt that deliverance just like those who actually felt the deliverance went through.

[15 : 54] Do you understand that? So we, through our remembering, we experience the actual deliverance of God. And the way that that happens that remembering is tied to action, to taste and sounds.

If you really want to remember something, you need to engage the senses. And we see that with the feast and with the consecration of the firstborn. This engaging of the senses to help drive down the remembrance.

Have you ever noticed that your emotions change when you smell a familiar smell? Maybe it's bread and it makes you think of your grandma and feel like you can talk with her if she's passed on even as you smell it because it's so ingrained in your memory that this is what grandma's house smells like.

Or the, our senses, our memory, our emotions, they're all connected. What we've, we've done, each of our children have a song that we, that my wife sings to them.

They're songs that had meaning for us when we were pregnant with them and when we were raising them in their early years. And those are songs now that my wife sings to them at bedtime.

[16 : 58] And even as they've grown up they have a special connection with those songs. Now, we didn't really plan this. It kind of happened serendipitously that we gave them each a song but I'm glad it's a tradition that we have given them because those songs have penetrated into the bedrock of the memory of our kids.

And they'll, they'll quote them and apply them to their lives. And the message of the song is, is readily, just, it's brought up to my kids even when we hum the tune. We don't even have to say the words and they feel the message of the songs that we have kind of implanted into them.

High performance athletes also, they know this connection between our senses and our emotions. I was never a high performance athlete but I had coaches who were into this and my track coach taught me, this is really strange but it works, he taught me to tap my thumb and my middle finger together after a good training session or a good performance and it locks in the endorphins of that experience so that even now, I haven't raced for 13 years but even now if I tap my thumb and my middle finger together, I get excited, I get ready to have that feeling of victory, of confidence and I get ready to compete.

God knew that this connection between our senses and our memory and our emotions was there. It's like he designed us or something. So when he tells Israel to remember, he builds that remembering around a tactile sensory experience.

Baking this bread, it's harder so that how it, the sound when it cracks, the taste in the mouth. He builds these things to remind us in not just a vocal way but in a deep way in engaging all of our senses.

[18 : 55] They come to the temple to redeem their firstborn and they smell the lamb they remember, they experience. But even if something is tactile, it doesn't burn into our memory unless it's regular.

So to really burn something into our memory in our lives, we need it to happen regularly. So remembering is regular and obvious. So by that, I don't mean just that it happens often but that it happens at a regular interval.

So take these two ceremonies that are listed here. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be celebrated every spring. We even have the date in the month of Habib and then the name of the month, if you're interested, was changed when Israel moved the same month but they called it Nisan after when they went into the promised land.

But it happened at a regular interval and every spring was an opportunity to remember that God is good, that God is powerful, and that God was with them. Similarly, every spring, if you have any background in farming, you know that that's when the new animals are born and so many of these would be the first born of their lineage and they would be consecrated to God.

So it would be another opportunity at regular intervals to participate in another celebration of remembrance. Because of all this, there would be a clear and a constant reminder of the nature of God and the work that he did for Israel at Passover.

[20 : 23] Again, if you look at verse 9, it says, and it shall be a sign on your hand as a memorial between your eyes. And it says something similar in verse 16. Now, if you are very observant, you might notice that since last time I was here, I got new glasses.

Probably pretty hard for you to tell that. But the reason I got new glasses is, well, basically because I'm an idiot and I knocked my glasses off a shelf and they got stepped on and so they were taped up.

And they were taped up last time I was here. And so I had to tape the arm back on. But because I couldn't fold the arm, then they got in the way more. And so last week, I dropped them again and I lost a lens. And so I had a lens taped on.

And so this says you'll be reminded, it'll be a sign in front of your eyes. And I had that. I had scotch tape covering up half of my vision. So every time I walked around, there was something right in front of my eyes reminding me of my intelligence level.

which wasn't exactly something I wanted to be reminded of. So I got new glasses. But here it is something that we do want to be reminded of. And this reminder is going to be so obvious that it's like it's tape in front of your glasses.

[21 : 27] And those of you who don't have glasses, it's like you have something right in front of your eyes. Or it's something that you know like the back of your hand. That's the two kind of pictures that it's saying. A sign on your hand or a memorial between your eyes. It's obvious.

It's something that you see all the time. A reminder of God's nature and what God has accomplished for us is in front of us all of the time. Now there's a danger if something is regular and obvious.

And that danger is that it just becomes routine. So it's really important to be reminded regularly by the danger of that. And so when we remember something, they can't just become routine or mundane.

And that's why these instructions that God gives us are also sacrificial and doxological. So remembering is sacrificial and doxological. Sacrificial, they're sacrificial because they come at a huge cost.

A lamb, we don't really deal in animal currency very much. So we don't know how much it meant to them. But a lamb would be a significant investment. So to give each firstborn lamb from all of your flock, plus the sacrifices for redemption of work animals or of your children, that would be a significant cost.

[22 : 35] And doxological, it's just a fancy word that means worship. And I didn't choose it just because I could be fancy and counterbalance the glasses story. But I chose that word because dox is the Greek word for glory.

And so that's why it means worship, because it's to give glory to God. But glory really means weight. So when I say that these acts of remembrance are doxological, I mean that they recognize and they confess the glory of God, the weight of God, how much matter he has, how much he matters, and how important he is.

So when we give to God, we are confessing that his worth, and we're confessing his meaning. We're confessing that his glory is greater than the glory of what we're giving up.

Okay, so Jesus said, we know this, Jesus said, where your treasure is, your heart will be also. And sometimes we think that just means that what we give to that shows where our heart is. But actually it means more than that.

That means that your treasure, where you give things that you value, that's the lead, and it's tied to your heart. So where you give your treasure, your heart will follow.

[23 : 41] Okay, so that's why these acts of remembering are tied to giving of value, not because God needed the lambs, but because when we give sacrificially, our heart follows to what we give.

Alright? So remembering is sacrificial and doxological. Now all this remembering seems really costly.

It takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of effort, so why should we even do it? Why should we even remember? Why did God pause the whole nation of Israel in the middle of their evacuation out of Egypt?

Why did God take time in the middle of an event that Israel had been waiting 400 years for and say, whoa, just wait. Let me give you some instructions of how to remember. Well, as usual, it was because God knew.

God knew where Israel was going. He knew that he was giving them a mission to present him to the world. He knew that he was sending them to be in the world, but not to be of the world.

[24 : 47] He knew that they were going to be surrounded by enemies. He knew the challenges that Israel would face as they went into the promised land and were given laws and signs to represent who God was to the rest of the world.

Does that situation sound familiar? It's the exact same situation that we're in. So why do we remember? Well, maybe one of the things you think of is Psalm 119.

And the psalm of Sarah says, I have hidden your word in my heart so I will not sin against you. So we remember so that we don't sin against God. But it's easy to read this in a very narrow way and say, well, this is just memorizing God's rules so that we won't break them.

But if you read through the rest of that psalm, and it takes a while, it's the longest chapter in the Bible, you'll see that there's a lot more going on there. The psalm is filled with a great love for God. And it's a love that's fueled by God's word.

It's fueled by his law, but it's also fueled by revelations, by stories that show the character of God, like the Exodus narrative. But if we don't see that, we end up with a picture of the Christian life as just memorizing a bunch of rules so that we don't break them.

[25 : 58] Memorizing a bunch of rules and then trying really, really hard to follow them. But that picture doesn't really make sense if you think about some of the stories that Jesus told. Stories like this one. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up.

Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Does that sound like memorize these rules and then try really hard to follow them? No.

Jesus is saying, look, being with me is a treasure. A treasure of innumerable value. Being in relationship with God is that treasure and that is why it is worth giving up everything else for.

So to put this back in the Exodus narrative that the God of the universe, I am, who so clearly demonstrated his power over the Egyptians was with Israel that he adopted them as his people.

That was a great treasure. A great treasure. And that is why God called them to remember. A treasure buried in a ground can easily be forgotten.

[27 : 01] But imagine the story without the treasure. At best, you have, you ought to go and dig holes in dirt. If you forget the treasure, that's basically all that that passage is saying.

Now, maybe you could force yourself to go around and dig holes for a little while because you've convinced yourself that that's the moral or the proper thing to do, but you won't be able to do that for very long. And that's why God is impressing on Israel to remember.

To remember the treasure. To remember his power, his character, and what he accomplished for them in the Exodus. And that's why he's calling them to remember the mission that he's called them to.

To keep in mind the treasure so that they could do what he was calling them to. There's an old story I heard recently. It's probably apocryphal, but that doesn't affect it that much.

And it takes place in the south of the States. And there's a man sitting with his grandson on the veranda in twilight and around their pack of hunting dogs.

[28 : 04] And one of the dogs suddenly perks up his ears, stands up, gives a little woof, and heads off. And shortly the other dogs kind of do the same thing and they're off probably going to catch something.

And the grandfather leans over their grandson and he says, you watch. Those 11 other dogs, they'll come back in about 15 minutes, tail between their legs, sulking. They'll come back and lay down on the veranda.

But that first dog, he'll be out there chasing until he finds that rabbit and brings him back. And sure enough, that's exactly what happened. And the 11 dogs, they come back and they tail between their legs, they didn't find anything.

They come back and they lay down. But that one dog, he was out there for a long time and eventually he came back and he's got the rabbit in his mouth. Now what's the difference? That first dog, he experienced the rabbit.

He saw it. He had a tactile sensory experience and he saw that rabbit. He knew that it was there. And the other dogs, they were just out there making noise, following what they thought they were supposed to do, but they didn't see it.

[29 : 13] They didn't experience. Now, not all of Israel could experience the Exodus. That's why they had to remember it. They had to see God's work through the stories and through the meals to the point that they would experience it.

Without it, they were just running around and making noise until they would come back to the porch empty handed. And you know what? That's exactly what happened historically. The beginning of Judges tells us, and all that generation were also gathered to their fathers.

All that generation died and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel. And if you know the message of Judges, it's kind of like a toilet bowl.

Things go down and down and down because people didn't remember. Israel had forgotten. They had stopped experiencing God and because of that, they failed in their mission. Instead of transforming the people around them, they became like the people around them and they capitulated to them.

They lost their treasure so they tried to fashion for themselves a new one. You know what? It can't be that way with us. You see, God had rescued them out of Egypt at the cost of the firstborn of everyone in Egypt, but he rescued us at the cost of his firstborn, Jesus Christ.

[30 : 26] And unless we remember that, unless we experience it, unless we know the hidden treasure of what that means for us, we will not be able to accomplish what God has called us to do.

Remembering is what helps us fight sin. Remembering is what helps us follow the law. Remembering is what sets us on mission. Remembering is what allows us to be the church.

So the question is, are we remembering? What are we doing to remind ourselves of who God is and what he's accomplished for us? So in a minute, I want you to gather with two or three or four people who are sitting around you and I want you to talk about how do you remember?

What do you do that helps you remember? What are you doing that's communal and proclamative so that the nature of God and his work on our behalf is passed on to others, particularly onto our families?

What are you doing that is experiential and tactile so you don't merely think about God's redemption, but you feel it and picture it? What are you doing that's regular and obvious so that you are constantly challenged by the work of God and the mission that he has sent us on?

[31 : 36] What are you doing that is sacrificial and doxological so that you are being reminded that where your treasure goes, your heart follows. Okay? You understand what I'm asking you to do? So I want you to take a few minutes and discuss with your neighbors.

If you're really shy or you're just visiting, it's okay to pretend that someone called you and you can't participate, but I would encourage you to try and participate. But talk with your neighbors.

I'll give you a few minutes. Take notes. Some of you would have a bulletin that has a place to take notes. And if there's areas that you need to remember more, that you need to do a better job at remembering, then brainstorm together what you can do.

And then after giving you some time to do that, I'll come back and I'll pray to close that time. All right? Do we understand? Okay. You go ahead and you do that. going over. You go ahead and you big!!]