

What will you remember?

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceathens.com.

! But for the rest of us, where were you?

I'm sure you remember that day like me. Where were you? Were you at work? Were you in class? I was kind of heading to class. Were you rousing yourself from sleep when that first plane hit? What happened? Do you remember that day? Yeah. I mean, what was your response to that day? What did you do? Do you remember what happened? You know, it was a day emblazoned on the memory of the United States of America.

So what do you remember? Some say an event like 9-11 creates what are called flashbulb memories. And the idea is that this event is so surprising, so shocking, that it's like a flash that goes off in our mind, in which we remember vividly, in a detailed way, in a fixed way, all of what happened.

[1 : 20] Our memory is fixed and reliable from a day like that. Well, some folks tested this theory after 9-11. They interviewed people to ask them what happened to them on that day.

So they asked them one day after, on September 12th, 2001. I'm not going to do the dates because I'll mess that up in front of you. Three years after, and then 10 years after, they asked the people the same question.

What did you do? How did you hear? Who told you? And things like that. What they found was interesting and surprising. On the one hand, folks remained confident that they knew what they did and how they heard.

They knew what they were getting into on 9-11. However, the memories gradually changed. Where they were and how they found out and what they did changed.

You know, my favorite is some respondents, when they were confronted with, Hey, your memory, you know, now five years later is not the same as it is a day later. And they would, you know, they were so adamant that they were right and that that was wrong, whatever the answer was, that they showed them the paper with their handwriting from the interview.

[2 : 26] And they said, that's not my handwriting. You know, I didn't write that. But this idea is that memory is a funny thing. It's far more faulty than we realize.

It has more cracks than we realize. It's not just shaped by the details of the event, but how we look back on them, how we feel about them. You ever look back on a season of your life that was excruciatingly painful, and then you look back and almost want to go back and do it again, which is like insane.

Well, our text this morning wants to help us remember. Because we know our memory is so prone to forget.

This text wants to help us remember the first days of faith rightly. It wants to help us remember what to think about those days. What do you think about when you think about those first days of faith?

Do you think about the church you were in when you walked down the aisle? Do you think about kneeling and praying some prayer? Do you think about some steps of faith you made?

[3 : 31] Or maybe these new desires you had. I remember opening the New Testament for the first time, and these words just jumped off the page. What do you think about when you think about those days? Our text this morning wants to help us look back and remember, first and foremost, God's activity behind it all.

Our text wants us to look back and not so much remember what we did, but remember the work of His grace. In a word, where we're going is, remember not the day of your faith.

Remember the work of His grace. Remember not the day of your faith, the day that you walked forward and did those things. Remember the work of grace. I'm going to break this out like every good preacher in three points.

First one, remember who we were. Remember who we were. Like many of his letters, Paul begins this letter with thanksgiving.

He begins by just thanking God for this church, but this thanksgiving exceeds all the others. Look down there with me real quick. Personal. Personal. If you look in there, he just keeps saying, I, I, I, me, my, you.

[4 : 40] So he's having this personal conversation with them, and he's just sharing his heart. You know, he keeps saying things like, always, every prayer of mine, with joy.

He is so enamored with this church. He's over the top in his language, and it's decidedly broad the whole time. You all, you all, you all.

Now, in the South, we'd say y'all. You know, we just throw those together. But every reference to him. So he always has the whole church always in mind. He's talking to everyone.

But why is he telling them this? This is when I, when I approach this passage, I say, so Paul, you're thankful about it. Why are you writing to this church and telling them how you're thanking them?

You know, is it because you want credit for your prayer and for you just so they get credit, you know, that kneeling in the, in the, in the closet all by themselves doesn't work.

So they want that credit when they pass you or something like that. Why is Paul, is that what Paul's doing? You know, what's going on here is Paul's thanking God for the Polypians and listing out the reason why he's doing so, because he wants them to remember rightly what God has done.

[5 : 48] He wants them to, he wants us to remember who we were. It's vital. Paul immediately takes us back to the joyful beginnings of the church in Philippi.

He was an apostle. He was a pioneer, as we talked about last night. No one planted more, or last week, no one planted more churches than him. No one preached the gospel in those days more than him.

I think we have a map for you to look at a little bit about what's going on. If you look down your bottom right, maybe it'll help them out of the way, is Jerusalem. And Paul was traveling up to Cilicia. You see that in Cappadocia and Galatia and Bithynia and Pontus. And Paul was preaching the gospel. But when he went through those regions, the Holy Spirit shut his mouth, is what Acts 15 said.

So he couldn't speak, Acts 16 actually. He couldn't speak there. But he saw a vision to go to Philippi. And this is when I need my pointer. But if you see where it says Thrace, right there you see Philippi right underneath it, right next to Neapolis.

[6 : 55] And Paul saw this vision calling him to Philippi. And he goes to preach the gospel there. And what happened in Philippi was just the joyful beginnings of this church.

So he's writing to this church now. But what we're kind of hearing him talk about is these joyful beginnings. Lydia and her house were converted, which we'll hear about in a moment. And no doubt others were as well.

But gradually things got rocky. You know, a slave girl with a spirit of divination was following Paul around saying, These men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation.

Which was true, but it got annoying. Paul said, For many days this lady followed them around and said, These men are servants of the Most High God and proclaim to you the way of salvation.

And that would probably get a bit annoying to us too. Well, Paul turned to her, confronted her, and commanded the spirit to come out of her. So the spirit of divination is just a spirit to see into the future and to see things.

[8 : 02] And this rocked the city. Immediately this slave girl and her spirit of divination, that brought money to numerous men in the city. And once that was catalyzed, mad.

And Paul was beaten. And Silas with him. They were attacked. Their clothes were ripped off. They were beaten, thrown in prison with their feet fastened in the stocks. And next we hear, after midnight, he's singing in prison.

Now he's singing because he made it through all those areas with his mouth shut. But when he arrives in Philippi, there's a response to the gospel. And so he's singing because of that. But he's singing with his feet in stocks.

And then there's a huge earthquake. All the doors were open. The bonds were unfastened. And the jailer woke up and he saw this just chaos. And I'm about to lose my job.

I'm going to be beheaded or something like that. So he begins to take his own life. And Paul says, stop. Don't do it. We're all here. And then the jailer, having no doubt heard of his preaching, fell down before Paul and Silas and said, what must I do to be saved?

[9:12] I'm telling you a lot of this background because we're going somewhere with this. But we must pause right here. That's one of the most important questions in our lives, that we will never know Christ until we ask that question with the same sincerity and the same urgency.

What must I do to be saved, to be right with God? And they said, in a moment, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Now that is the best news in the world. What he's saying is, believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins, that you couldn't be saved apart from putting your trust in his death, so that you might be forgiven and receive everlasting life.

And the text says, that same hour he was baptized. And so when Paul writes to him, when Paul writes to the Philippians, the jailer is sitting in the audience.

When Paul writes to the Philippians, the jailer and other people just like him were sitting there in the audience. And so he begins to write them and he says, thank you. They're gathered to hear this word.

[10:17] He says, thank you. And the first thing he says, thank you for is your partnership in the gospel. Look in verse 5. Because of your partnership in the gospel.

So essentially what he's saying is, remember who you were. You were those who believed the gospel. He's writing to you. He's reminding you just as God would remind us.

You were those who believed in the gospel. You realized that a little cleaning up would not work. You knew you needed to be saved. You trusted in Christ at the hearing of the gospel.

You didn't merely believe though, is what he's saying. You became partners. Now this is an incredible word that we could just spend way too much time on. It's a wonderful word.

It means fellowship. It means closely connected. I mean, it's kind of a commercial word. So you hear that. I mean, guys start a business and they have partners, you know. And it kind of has that commercial overtones in it.

[11:17] This giving and sharing in the gospel. So the idea is they didn't merely believe, but they began to share in this gospel. They began to become a part of the work.

And we see this in the life of the jailer. It just pops out of Acts 15. After he's baptized upon his conversion, he washes their wounds. He was one of the ones that beat him. Then he takes him and washes his wounds.

That's the picture of the gospel. Then he takes him into his house and gives him food to eat. The idea is that they became one with it.

We see this in the life of the Philippian church as well, all throughout there. The idea is that Christianity is not easy believism. It does not. Christianity is a whole life belief lived out in the local church.

That's what's going on here. They become partners in the gospel. What's implied there is that they become committed to the work of God's people. Sinclair Ferguson says it like this.

[12:13] Our commitment to Christ implies a commitment to Christ's people. Our commitment to Christ implies a commitment to Christ's people. And they just saw that immediately. Following Christ demands a whole life belief.

That's all a church is. It's not a building. It's a people. That's why we're a church and we ain't got a building. And if you're our group, we're a group of people with a whole life belief in the gospel.

That because of what we believe about the church, we're trying to build a church in Athens. Now, we're not an impressive group. And we're kind of meandering through this meeting a little bit.

We'll get back. We've attended, and many of us attended a church called Cornerstone Church of Knoxville. But we've had a growing longing to see a church here. There are people we love and want to serve while you're invited.

And this may not be the church for you. I'm not assuming that. And that's completely okay. But what this text tells us for you, I would have a passion for you to have this same conviction that I have.

[13:15] That the gospel is a whole life belief. It's meant to live out in a community. That's what's assumed all throughout the New Testament.

The church isn't a weekend ritual. It's not a school. It's not a building to go to. God wants you to view the church as a family. And this jailer, right after he puts down the bat that he beat Paul with, he washes his wounds.

Because that's what you do with family. And he invites them in. Remember who we were. We were an impressive group of people. We were those who believed the gospel. And said, I'm going to throw my whole life into it.

That's all that I am. Point two, remember who we are. Remember who we are. Paul continues his thanksgiving and lists another reason he's thankful.

Look in verse five. He says, because of your partnership, remember, in the gospel from the first day until now, and I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[14:20] So Paul has our entire life in view here. From the first day. You see that? From the first day until now, and I am sure, to completion.

So Paul wants us to think about all our days in a moment. That's what he's doing. From the first day until now, and to completion. And what he says is behind all those days, behind our salvation, and wherever it leads, is the one who began that good work.

I love this. In this verse, God is not referred to as God. He's referred to as the one who began.

That's so good. That's what I believe about the Lord.

He's just the one who began it all. Now, he is so many other things, but he is the one who began it. This verb is carefully chosen. It means to inaugurate. Now, you know, at the election several years ago, we didn't just kind of walk up and pass a baton across.

I mean, in the United States, the inauguration is a solemn and serious service, right? And so Donald Trump was sworn in in a serious way.

[15:29] Well, that's what's going on here. There's an inauguration that happened, an eternity past, and that is what the God the Father has done. That's what he's saying. One commentator said, it's a decisive and deliberate act, a solemn act, not haphazard or random, something planned and brought about flawlessly.

It's an act no less than an act of the good God we call Father. Behind the curtain of human history, it's God who works and directs all things unto the salvation of sinners like you and me.

And the Philippians were well aware of this. It's their story. It's no surprise that Paul reminds them of it. I love the way it's articulated in the life of Lydia.

Look there with me in Acts 16. I think we have it for you on the screen. Acts 16, verse 11. It says, It says, I love that.

You know, the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what Paul said. The Lord opened her heart. You know, it reads so quietly and simply.

[17:39] But from an internal perspective, this was no quiet act. God moved Lydia and loved Lydia long before that day. God was plotting and preparing for this day long before it arrived.

He shut Paul's mouth all through Phrygia, Galatia, and Mysia and called him through a vision to Philippi. Why? Because Lydia was there. Paul called them.

He shut his mouth when he went through those regions because he needed to go to Philippi.

Because he needed to preach the gospel to Lydia. And he just so happens, the text says, to find her at this prayer meeting.

And as he was preaching, the Lord opened her heart. That is incredible. What seems like this simple, quiet act was no simple, quiet act.

The lights came on. She was given the gift of faith. She came alive. Gone was a dead heart. In the moment she passed from death to life.

[18:41] From the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved son. Her desires were immediately changed. And she prevailed upon us. I love that. She didn't just serve on us.

She just kind of won us over, you know. She prevailed. She overcame our reluctance to receive hospitality from her. Because she was born again. And all she knew to do was to show that type of love.

And what Paul is saying to the Philippians is, do you remember? Do you still remember? Do you still remember that he began this?

Do you still remember that you didn't stumble into this? Did you still remember that it wasn't your great faith that led to your conversion? He'd say the same thing to us. God would say the same

thing to us. It wasn't because we were good guys.

I wasn't a good guy. It wasn't because you had your life together. It was the Lord who was behind it all. That's what he's saying. Remember who you are. You are one on whom God has acted.

[19 : 39] You are one on whom God has planned. You are one on whom God has plotted. You are one on whom God has acted to bring you from darkness into life. And Paul's calling us to remember. That's all we are.

That's all we are. Charles Spurgeon said it like this. One weeknight, I was sitting in the house of God.

I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon. I hope that's not to you today. The thought struck me, how did you come to be a Christian? I sought the Lord.

The truth flashed across my mind in a moment. I should not have sought him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek him. I prayed, thought I. But then I asked myself, how did I come to pray?

Pray by reading the scriptures. How did I come to read the scriptures? I did read them. But what led me to do so? And in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all.

[20 : 41] And that he was the author of my faith. And so the whole doctrine of grace opened up for me, and I desire to make this my constant confession. I ascribe my change wholly to God.

Do you see what's going on here? Do you see what he's trying to remind them? It's God behind it all. He drew us. He opened our eyes. He saved us, whether we were rescued as a college student or a preteen.

And God wants us to see that beginning as decisive. And to trust that that ending will be just as decisive. He who called you is faithful.

One of the things I love to pray to the Lord, and you may laugh, is that, Lord, I didn't sit down in a jam. And things aren't going as I planned.

It's so good to remember that I wasn't seeking God. When I entered my, in between my sophomore and junior year at the University of Tennessee, and I just received a DUI, and my life was kind of going down the tubes, addicted to various substances, I was just aware that I didn't seek the Lord.

[21 : 51] I would have never sought the Lord. And that's the truth of all of us. Regardless of whether we were saved at five years old or we were saved at 25, we didn't seek the Lord.

We would never sought the Lord had He not moved on us. I didn't start this. I invite you to pray that with me. I didn't start this, Lord, and I trust that if I didn't start it, I won't complete it. You will. You'll bring this thing to completion.

That's all He's trying to say. He's trying to say, remember who you are so that you remember who's going to complete it, who's going to take it all the way to the end. There's a couple things we need to remember here. One, if we're going to remember who we are, we must remember who we aren't. We are not the best people on the planet. I'm not a Christian because I'm the best husband. I'm not a Christian because I'm the best father or neighbor or gentleman.

My neighbors, since I've moved into Athens, they have out-neighbored me on so many levels. I'm not a Christian because I'm the best neighbor. I'm only a Christian because God's acted on me.

[22 : 53] God sought me. Don't get me wrong. I want to be a better neighbor. I want to be a better husband, a better father. But that's not what got me in. I'm just someone who God has acted upon.

If we're going to remember who we are also, we must keep looking back to who began this. We must not look to our baptism or our first days of faith.

We must not look back to those types of things. You know, it doesn't really matter. If you know the day you got saved, great. If you don't, great. It doesn't matter.

We must not look backwards to that day when we were saved or inwards, but always be looking outwards and upwards. That's what this text is saying. Remember who you are, not by looking back or looking at your present life, but looking outward and upward to God.

To gain the confidence and assurance we desperately need, that's where we look. To He who began it. And to the saving grace He freely gives in Jesus Christ.

[24 : 02] Thirdly, remember who we will be. Remember who we will be. Paul continues to thank God for the Philippians as he continues and turns to the ground of his confidence.

Now, he gets a bit defensive almost here. He tells us why it's right for him to believe that God's going to complete the work He began in them. And so threading through verses 7 and 8 are these feeling sounding words.

I feel this way about you. See that? I hold you in my heart. I yearn for you. The affection of Christ Jesus. He says at the end, it almost sounds as if he's saying, it's right for me to believe that you will make it all the way because I love you.

Now, I don't know about you, but that's not thoroughly helpful to me. You know, my mom always loves me, but that's not going to comfort me very much. You know, my life can still go down the tubes and mom will still love me.

It doesn't supply the confidence I need, right? We need something more, Paul, than just I love you. So what's he trying to say? It's right for me to feel this way. I hold you in my heart.

[25 : 16] I yearn for you. The affection of Christ. He said it's right for me to feel this way because of the grace we share. Look down at verse 7b. He says, you all are partakers with me of grace.

He's saying it's right for me to feel this confidence. It's right for me to hold you in my heart. It's because of the grace we share. Because we share in grace. When Paul thinks of the Philippians, as is obvious from this text, he thinks of grace.

When he thinks of them, he thinks of grace. Now, in one sense, all Christians, when we think of all Christians, we should think of grace. All Christians share grace. By grace, every Christian is saved. So when we think of any Christian, we think of grace. But what Paul's doing here is he thinks of specific grace. They become partakers with him of specific grace.

He thinks about evidences of grace among them. Evidence of God at work. He thinks of their remembrance of him in verse 3.

[26 : 20] He thinks of their continual gifts to them in verse 5. He thinks of their prayers for him in verse 19. He thinks of their continual standing with him in the imprisonment and defense of the gospel. What he means there is this, in all the trials that I've faced in my imprisonment, in all that I've faced in defending the gospel, you've stood beside me.

That's what he's saying in verse 7. Their deep affection for him and his deep affection for them. All that is the fruit of grace. Yes, saving grace leaves inerasable marks of grace in our lives.

Saving grace leaves inerasable marks of grace. Grace is not just favor, which it is, which we studied last week. Grace is power. Grace is power.

It's a person, actually, who comes to live within us and produces fruit in us. When Kim and I, my wife Kim, I don't think I've mentioned her.

She's right down here. She's a lovely person. Didn't mention her last week. But when Kim and I lived in Knoxville, at one point we gathered all our life savings and bought a house.

[27 : 24] Now, that's one of those fearful moments as a growing adult where you sign away to pay for something you could never pay, you know, in 15 lifetimes or something. And so, this house was great.

You know, I remember sitting down in this one of the rooms and just, I would just thank the Lord every morning. I just felt so amazed that we had a house, you know, so stunned. I mean, how kind, you know.

But the house needed some work. You know, the walls were totally 1968, you know. The floors were, the lights were dim, you know.

You walk in some older homes, all the lights are kind of dim. They're just inadequate. The backyard needed to be tamed, you know. Like, Dominion needed to arrive in the backyard. And so, I just got to work, you know.

There were just so many nights. I was there to like two in the morning working. One particular night, one of my friends, God rest his soul, crazy guy, fell through our ceiling. At that point, I decided to rip out this whole closet.

[28 : 26] And it was August. And there was this gaping hole in the house. I remember Kim went by the next day. I didn't tell her what I had done. She went by the next day and said, you ruined the house we spent our life saving trying to buy.

I was like, honey, trust me. We'll fix that. We'll get it going. But gradually, yeah, it started to get better. We moved in. And it began to look better.

The floors were new. And clean. Pretty. You know, the colors of the wall were bright. Not faded and dingy in that way.

The backyard got tamed. I ripped out this fence and got out a chainsaw. And the kitchen was renovated and welcome. You know, in a similar way, just like I moved into that house to change some things around.

Similarly, when we come to Christ, we're like that old house. We're enslaved to all sorts of things. We're troubled by shame and guilt. We have weaknesses.

[29 : 27] We have sins that we're fighting. But when Christ purchased us, He moved in. He took up residence. It's His house now.

You're His house now. And He begins to change things. He begins to reign in our hearts. He begins to replace our anger with peacefulness.

Begins to replace our bitterness with graciousness. Begins to replace our lust with true love. And replace our critical words with encouragement. He begins to replace our unbelief with trust.

And begins to replace our anxiety with faith. The idea is that He moves in and He keeps changing things. And all those changes are evidence of grace. Evidence that He's within us.

Evidence that He's working among us. What Paul's saying is, how is that helpful? How is that helpful to us? Because it demonstrates to us. And what Paul's saying is that God is at work in you.

[30 : 27] So Paul's saying, remember who you will be by looking at the grace. Looking at Jesus Christ who's changing you.

Who's at work. He will bring it to completion. He'll finish that house. The idea is that He moves in upon conversion. He begins to work on all these different things.

And He's not going to stop working until the end. And John Piper says, oftentimes we know of one or two or three things God is doing in our life. But He's doing 1,000 things we don't see. That's what God's up to.

And all that is grace. And if you're looking, evidences of grace are everywhere. When someone gives a soft answer to anger, that's grace.

When someone walks steadily through suffering, that's grace. When someone keeps doing the same job year after year with joy, that's grace.

[31 : 29] That's not what we can produce in our own effort is what Paul's saying. When someone prays for us, that's grace. When someone welcomes us into their home to show love, when they just want to lay down and take a nap, that's grace.

When someone even thinks of another person. When a son of Adam thinks of another person, that's grace. A congregation this size, a group this size, these evidences of grace are everywhere. And Paul would have us be on the lookout, you know. Be on the lookout looking for grace. Far too often we live unaware of what God's doing in our life. And Paul's writing the Philippians to say, I do feel you.

I hold you in my heart. I love you. All these type things. The reason he's saying that is I hold you in this way because I want to point out there is grace in your midst. God is in your midst.

And God who brought you here will bring you to the end. So let us emulate Paul. Not just thank the Lord in private, but thank people in public.

[32 : 35] Find them out. Say, man, thank you for doing that. That is evidence of grace. So memory is a funny thing.

It's far more faulty than we realize. It's far more affected by what we think or feel than we realize. And one day our memory will completely fail.

This summer we just walked. We completely lost her memory and her bearing. In this world we won't remember our work.

I can't remember what we did. We won't remember our joys and sorrows. We won't remember home. We won't be able to find home. We won't remember our family.

We won't even remember our name. But praise God. We can't remember anything else. He'll remember us. This text is pointing us to. We must not remember the great day of our faith.

[33 : 37] We must remember the work of His grace. Not because we're holding on to Him. But because by the grace of God He's holding on to us. And His grace towards us will not be in vain.

He who called us will keep us. And He who keeps us will deliver us to eternal joy in Jesus Christ. Let us pray. Father in heaven we thank you for your mercy towards us in Jesus Christ. We cast ourselves on you. God I pray that we would rest in this grace.

God I pray that we would re-read these words and find ourselves comforted by what it says about us. We'll bring it to completion. That He who called us is faithful.

He will do it. We give you thanks and praise. In Jesus name. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander.

[34 : 44] Lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace. Please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com Thank you for listening to our story. you