We Remember

## (Psalms 137:1-6)

I have come to realize over the years the great value of remembering. I’m still young, but as I’ve gotten older, I’ve come to realize the value of memories. The ability to remember those moments celebrating anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays seem to become more and more fleeting. Much has affected my memory over the years and so I treasure those memories of time spent with people whom I value and appreciate.

To lose your ability to remember is a great tragedy and anybody who has had a family member with Alzheimer’s knows how important and helpful it is to remember. It is your memories that define who you are as you sit on the couch or sit around the campfire on a cool evening. It’s those precious memories that we talk about and laugh about when our teeth are in a cup on the nightstand.

I find that it’s often the silliest little things that I remember and that stick with me, but I often need help remembering those people, places, and things that really matter. And so, we pause in our busy lives this weekend for a national time of remembrance for fallen firefighters and there were many across the nation and a few close the home. We want to honor them and remember their lives and their service and their sacrifice because Jesus said,

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

And so, we look back to remember our friends, family, and neighbors who have gone on before us. Those like Frederick County Deputy Chief, Chester Lauck; Lieutenant Brian Martinez of the Mont Alto Volunteer Fire Department;

Frederick County Battalion Chief, Christopher David Morlan; Frederick County Firefighter, Ian Thomas Strickler, and the many other fallen firefighters. There are too many to list here, but we must remember and honor them for their courage, their sacrifice, and the price they paid on our behalf. And so, we pause in our busy lives to remember fallen firefighters this morning.

In fact, to remember is the gift of God who understands the importance of memories. Throughout Scripture we find God commanding believers to remember because there are things that God will do that will define your relationship with him that you just don’t want to forget. It’s for that reason that God commanded Moses,

"Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. Celebrate it at the appointed time, at twilight on the fourteenth day of this month, in accordance with all its rules and regulations" (Numbers 9:2-3).

And so, God wanted the children of Israel to remember this moment, that it would be ingrained in their memory, and that they would talk about that time when he caused the death angel to pass over them and he brought them out of Egypt delivering them from the oppression of Pharaoh. He said,

"Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians” (Exodus 12:24-27).

Holding onto that memory and being armed with that knowledge would be helpful when they face their enemies or whatever obstacle they were come against in the future, because it would be a point of reference to encourage them, building up their faith, and to define their identity as the children of God.

We find that later, after the coming of Christ, the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth, the night before he was offered up as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. And in that meal as he gathered with his disciples, he changed the meaning of the Passover to a greater and eternal truth that we call communion.

“He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).

And so, he was giving them a new memory, a new way of identifying with him, and he was replacing the body and the blood of the lamb with his own and he encouraged them saying,

“Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

In other words, he says, “As often as you do this, you are letting me know that you still remember.”

In fact, let’s go deeper if you could turn in your Bibles to Psalms chapter 137. We are going to use this text as the backdrop behind this message and I want you to listen to the words and feel the emotions. Verse one of chapter 137 says,

“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (Psalms 137:1-3).

“How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy” (Psalms 137:4-6).

I want to give you a little bit of context for your understanding because this is not a choir rehearsal, this is not a happy occasion, but this takes place at one of the most grievous moments in the history of Israel. The Bible says,

“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had invaded the land” (2 Kings 24:1).

And it’s almost unthinkable to imagine that God would allow their enemies to triumph over them, but that’s exactly what had happened. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem, he removed the treasures from the temple of the Lord, and took the people of God captive. Because even though the people of Judah knew who God was, they had forgotten him, they had ignored him, they weren’t serving him, not obeying him, and not submitting to him at all. And so, as a result he allowed them to be brought into submission by the Babylonians. The destruction was so complete that,

“Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him” (2 Kings 24:12).

And so, this text in Psalm chapter 137 is sad, it is emotional, it is full of remorse, but in order to appreciate what is being expressed you must understand that they had been conquered. And as the Lord had declared,

“Nebuchadnezzar…carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans — a total of ten thousand” (2 Kings 24:13-14).

Ten thousand captives of Judah, taken as plunder in the battle, beaten, bloody, and tired. They had been dragged out of Jerusalem in the hot Palestinian heat with chains around their ankles. And so, they had lost all dignity as they were taken their beloved Jerusalem, away from the holy city, away from their homeland, that not only defined their faith, it defined their identity as the people of God, and it defined everything about them.

“Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons” (2 Chronicles 36:20).

And so, this was devastating, it was a painfully crushing defeat, because Jerusalem was no more. Solomon’s magnificent temple where the priest had laid prostrate on the floor as the glory of God filled the temple was no more.

“The Babylonians set fire to the royal palace and the houses of the people and broke down the walls of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 39:8).

Zion, the holy city was destroyed and the people of Judah lost everything that defined them, that gave them distinction, and set them apart from the other nations.

They have been dragged out of Jerusalem with chains around their ankles hurting and suffering for 540 miles to a foreign land. The children of Israel who were known for their joyous songs and dancing had now become captives, just shuffling along, with nothing more than the sound of rattling chains. They were taken captive, dragged away from the holy city of Jerusalem, and now they found themselves in Babylon. They sat by the rivers of Babylon wept as they remembered Zion (Psalms 137:1).

And so, they are mourning as they’re remembering Jerusalem, remembering the smoke rising in the distance, much like I remember driving down Interstate 95 on 9/11 and seeing the smoke rising from the Pentagon. I remember it like it was yesterday. I remember the news reports of the Twin Towers coming down. I remember hearing the report when the plane crashed in Pennsylvania.

They are remembering Zion much like some of you might remember the Vietnam War or when John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King Jr. were assassinated. Certainly, all of us remember when everything was shut down because of a little virus. We’ve all got memories and today we remember with our brothers and sisters by the rivers of Babylon as they sat and they wept.

We are weeping with them, not because of our bloodied feet, or the discomfort of the chains around our ankles, but we weep as we remember what we have lost. And sometimes it’s all you can do to fight back the tears because of what we have lost, but like Jesus said we must…

“Remember the height from which you have fallen” (Revelation 2:5).

And so, they may have moved geographically, their names may have been changed, but the Babylonians couldn’t take away their identity. They are down by the rivers of Babylon but they still remembered whose they were and who they were.

That’s why it is important that we remember because there is not a believer in this room that God didn’t do something in your life as proof that he is God over every circumstance, every storm, and every trial in your life. And so, you don’t want to forget, you must not forget what he has taught you and revealed to you; but the truth is that often times we don’t appreciate what we have until we lose it.

In other words, we don’t appreciate our friends, our church, or our job until they’re gone. It seems like a weird thing to say, but sometimes you forget what you lost until someone comes along and reminds you. That’s what the psalmist said,

“There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (Psalms 137:2-3).

In other words, the only sound their captors could hear from the people of Israel was the sounds of weeping. They had taken their harps with which they sang and danced before the Lord and they hung them on the poplar trees. They were hurting and weeping down by the river when their captors asked them for a song.

Maybe some of you can relate, you are hurting right now, you may be weeping, and sometimes it gets difficult to worship. They said,

“How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land” (Psalms 137:4).

And so, they were weighed down, and burdened by their circumstances, and had hung their harps on the poplars. They had lost their families, lost their names, lost their culture, but they didn’t lose their memory, because nobody was going to get that part of them but God. They remember the Lord and the psalmist declared,

“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth” (Psalms 137:5).

There are many of you here who remember something God did for you, how he raised you up, how he brought you through it, and he gave you a testimony.

There are others of you here, I know there is someone here whom the devil tried to destroy, but you are still here to give God the praise, because you remember the great things the Lord has done. Someone has lost a child or spouse or a parent. Someone is a cancer survivor or has been burdened by sickness and God got you through it. There is something that you remember about God that will make you sing in your house, make you praise him while you are doing dishes, shout out while you are cutting the grass.

The psalmist said, “May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy” (Psalms 137:5-6).

And so, you don’t need a worship team, all you need to do is remember, just think about the goodness of the Lord and all that he has done for you. Because it’s those memories that keep us holding on, and so we don’t ever want to forget, and that’s why Jesus said,

“Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24).

In other words, we can’t ever let the chains become so burdensome, the pain so grievous, the journey so exhausting, that we forget what the Lord has done. We don’t ever want to get so lonely, so depressed, so discouraged, that we forget to sing the songs of the Lord.

Somebody listening right now is struggling because the enemy is trying to make you forget what you know about God, but listen to what David said,

“I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together” (Psalms 34:1-3).

I wonder if there is anybody else here, anybody besides me that remembers the goodness of the Lord? And right now, if God didn’t do anything else, if he doesn’t do another thing for you, his praise would always be on your lips.

That’s important, because you need to know what God did for you, you need to remember what God did for you, so that when all hell breaks loose and the enemy tries to take you captive, you remember what God can do. In fact, Job said this when his kids were dead, his house burned down, his animals and his crops destroyed. He said, all of that might be true, but I know,

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes” (Job 19:25-27).

In other words, I may not know what I am going to eat tomorrow, whether I’m going to get my job back, whether my marriage is going to work out, whether my children are going to serve the Lord, but I know that my Redeemer lives.

Today, as we celebrate communion, remembering who Jesus is, remembering what he did, remembering his promise to come back, we are agreeing together with Job. “I know that my God is good, I know that God is for real, I know God is powerful, and I know that my Redeemer lives.” And so, as we go down by the poplar trees, down by the river of Babylon, I’m asking you to remember. Remember who Jesus is, remember what he did, not just what he did for your mother or your grandmother, remember what he did for you. Remember how many times he brought you through things that you never thought you would have made it through.

We’ve got to remember, because we’ve got to live off the memory, and every demon of hell is trying to cause you to forget what it’s like to be a real worshiper of God, but Jesus tells us to remember. Your spiritual enemy has been trying to confuse you, trying to twist your mind, but the Spirit of God tells us to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). And for some of you, your minds will be renewed today, for others of you it will be a process, it may take time, because God works in different ways for different reasons with different people at different times. But I want to encourage you to remember what the Lord has done, and bless his name at all times, remaining faithful, because he will give you the victory.

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