

Memory

The Source of Hope

Lam 3:21

1

21 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.

Memories are fascinating things. They are something common to all. Even animals have them. Every night around 9 o'clock the dogs start roaming and watching our every move, they know that if we are going to have popcorn, that's about the time we will, and they love their popcorn. Memories can be both good and bad, in terms of what is being remembered. They can calm our emotions or they can cause us anxiety, or anger, or any of the emotions we have. They can be triggered by anything, a smell, a song, even a word. Our minds are complex things that work in ways so mysterious that not even those that have made it their lives to study it know all there is to know about it. There doesn't even seem to be a connection with things we deem important or significant to what we remember. Have you ever had that song that gets into your mind that you can't get out and it drives you nuts all day? Is it because that song holds some deep relevance for you, more often than not, no? But, for whatever reason, it's just there. And yet, there are so many of our memories that we can recall on command, if you will, though it is true that the older we get the more difficult that it seems to become. Memory can be many things. It can be the source of despair, worry, fear. It can lead us into despondency, depression, even worse if we allow it to overwhelm us and cause us to lose sight of who we are or maybe better said, who we should be.

The book of Lamentations is thought to have been written by the prophet Jeremiah and consists of five separate poems. In chapter 1 the prophet dwells on the multiple miseries of the city illustrated as a solitary widow weeping for her oppression. In chapter 2, these miseries are described in connection with the nation's sins that had caused them. Chapter 3, from where our text comes from, speaks of hope for the people of God. The chastisement was intended to be for their good; a better day would dawn for them. Chapter 4 laments the ruin and desolation that had come upon the city and temple, and traces it to the people's sins. Chapter 5 is a prayer that Zion's reproach may be taken away in the repentance and recovery of the people.

So, Jeremiah makes this statement that we have read, pointing out that hope is there if we will but remember. Note, that the text speaks of an act of memory by Jeremiah:

2

"This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope"

3

Interestingly in the previous verse Jeremiah talks of another memory...

Lam 3:20

4

20 Surely my soul remembers And is bowed down within me.

So in verse 20 he says that his memory has brought him down and in the very next verse he says that his memory gives him hope, life, comfort.

It is this idea of how memory can either help us or bring us down that we want to look at for a moment in this lesson, by looking at three different groups of people and how memory might affect them.

- 5** 1) Those seeking help
2) The believer who is in trouble
3) The Christian whose faith is waning

First then is...

- 6** 1) Those seeking help

There is always someone who is seeking help Lord. Our prayer is that there were more who sought that help in the Lord. That is the challenge. How can we get people to understand that help is there for the asking? How do we get them to see the help that is no farther away than the Word? It might seem simplistic, but if they could just remember that...

Eccl 12:1 **7**

1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"

Solomon says to "remember your creator," but what is to be remembered if one has not been taught? Look around, what do you see? Look at the world we live in, and I am not talking about the people. Look at the complexity of the ecosystem of the Earth. Everything is tied together. The deserts, the mountains, the valleys, the oceans all play a part in helping the world to provide for man a place to live. Do you really believe that all of this is an accident of some explosion? Look at the human body and how it functions, could it really be possible that, how every part of it works to do its job so perfectly is nothing more than a function of mutation? Note what the Psalmist says...

Ps 19:1 **8**

1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

When you look at this, do you see accident, mutation, or do you see design, perfectly coordinated to do its purpose? The Psalmist says that this is the message of God telling man that He is the creator. Now add this to what Paul says in...

Rom 1:20 **9**

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

The Psalmist describes the world and everything around it as telling the glory of God in their creation and Paul says that if we can't see that glory in His creation then we are blind and without excuse. All any man has to do is to look around and see what God has done and remember his creator. God tells us clearly...

Matt 7:7-8 **10**

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Do you see the promise of God here? One of the arguments that people will bring up as their excuse to not obey the scriptures is what about those people that have never heard of God, how can they be held accountable for what they don't know, and if they are accountable, then neither are they. Here is the answer, here is God's answer. Only the man who remembers his creator and seeks Him can ever find Him. Man does not come to God by accident. It must always be intentionally. Man can never be forced to come to God. It must always be willingly. Man must be willing to seek God because he has remembered that God is his creator and he needs God's help.

Our next point is the continuation of this one. The seeker has come to God in a faithful response to what he has been shown. He heard the Word and chose to believe it. He understood that Word to be the will of God and has decided to make that Word his will. He willingly chose to confess Jesus as His Christ, his Savior and he recognized that he was lost in his sin and the only way to be relieved of the burden of that sin, is to be washed in the blood of Christ through baptism. The seeker has become the believer and wouldn't be nice if once we become believers, we never again face the uncertainty of doubt...

11 2) The believer who is in trouble

Christ describes this in His parable of the sower in Luke 8 when He talks of the seed that fell among the thorns and weeds. The seed begins to grow but is then choked out by the weeds and thorns. That is the believer who is in trouble. Their faith is being choked out by the weeds and thorns of Satan and the world.

This really isn't an unusual position for the believer. We might like to think that we are impervious to the attacks of Satan and the lure of the world against our lusts and desires. That would be an imprudent attitude on our parts.

1 Cor 10:10-12

12

10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. *11* Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. *12* Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

Paul warns of the danger of our becoming so over confident in our knowledge and faith that we think ourselves beyond falling. It can happen to anyone, and too often happens to those who think they are the strongest.

Since we are talking about memories, do you remember this...

13

"I want you"

Now put whatever your image of Satan is, in place of Uncle Sam. Satan wants you, and will do any and everything he can to get us.

A quick aside; there are many in the world who think that this picture of Uncle Sam is a picture of Satan. The image of the United States both in and out of the country has been taking a lot of hits lately. I don't believe that there is necessarily any connection between any nation and the Church, but there is a connection between the liberty we have to meet in relative peaceful conditions and the nation we live in. We have brethren throughout the world that are not as fortunate. We should remember them in our prayers as well as remember that Jesus died for all who will come to Him.

Note some of the things that Jeremiah talks about as being what he is remembering that gives him hope...

Lam 3:22, 25, 31

14

22 The Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail.

25 The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him

31 For the Lord will not reject forever,

We need to understand that regardless of how bad we might think things have gotten, that even if we think we can't stand up to it, it is because of the Lord's mercy that we can. That is what we see in Jeremiah, he attributes his hope of being relieved of his oppression to what he remembers God having done. How can we possibly fight Satan? How do we overcome the lusts and desires of our flesh?

1 Cor 10:13

15

13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

16

"God is faithful"

How do we resist, with His help because He is faithful and will protect us from anything we cannot resist. We just need to remember that He has made that promise to us, and in that promise find the strength and courage within ourselves to fight the good fight and to keep the faith. As difficult as our journey might be, it is God that can strengthen us and increase our faith, helping us to become strong enough to prevail. There is an old Chinese proverb, attributed to Chapter 64 of the Tao Te Ching and ascribed to Laozi that says...

17

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"

I would amend it to read...

18

"A journey to eternal life begins with a single step of faith"

When our faith begins to ebb and become weaker we need to concentrate on and remember what God has done for us. We need to remember that this is His creation and we need to remember His great Love for us.

Our next point is so closely related to this one that it might even be the same point, but I am delineating between them to emphasize a thought I have. Please bear with me.

19 3) The Christian whose faith is waning

We have been discussing the believer who is being bombarded by the things of this world that are working to weaken their commitment to God. With this point I am talking about the Christian, new or not, who is beginning to find weakness in their resolve to follow after God's Word in its entirety, in its simplicity. We are seeing this more and more in congregations of God's people that for years were seen to staunch believers in and upholders of a stand for the truth. This is what Christ is talking about in His address to the Church at Ephesus...

Rev 2:4-5

20

4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first;

What is faith if it is not what motivates us to be committed to the truth of God's Word. If we are willing to leave that Word, to ignore it, or to pervert and change it to meet our needs, it isn't that we have discovered something that no one else has ever figured out before, remember, there is nothing new under the sun, it is because our faith has weakened to the point that we have left our first love, God's Word. Christ tells the Ephesians to...

21

“Remember your first love”

That's what Jeremiah was telling the Israelites to do; remember their first love for God and He had done for them and their hope would be renewed.

Brethren, if our brothers and sisters in Christ would just remember what God has done for them, for us, maybe they would find it more difficult to leave their first love for the Word.

That is our challenge. In the face of political correctness, in the face of civil unrest, in the face of so-called religious revolution, where do we stand, not only as individual Christians, but as the unified congregation of God's people in this area, the Eastside Church of Christ in Oakdale? Friends, like Jeremiah, we must needs remember all that God our creator and Savior has done for us so that our hope can be renewed, our faith strengthened, and our souls comforted in His love, mercy, and grace.

I'm reminded of a Statler Brothers song...

22

Do You Remember These?