**“Remembering to remember” – Ex. 12:43-13:16**

WCP

**Intro**

I want to talk with you this morning about the importance of remembering. It’s been said by far too may people to list, but you’ve likely heard the expression at some point that, “Those who fail to remember the past are doomed to repeat it.” or some variation of that. And the implication there is, of course, that – no matter how significant the event - as finite human beings we are prone to forget lessons already learned from past experiences. And so the study of history, as well as things like holidays or memorials, are often necessary to help keep those lessons in front of us so that we do not make the very same errors again.

Now, that axiom about not forgetting the past is often used in reference to negative events we never want to see repeated. Many of us, for example, have seen posters or bumper stickers referring to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 with the title “Never Forget”; we have Holocaust memorials/education centers reminding us about the atrocities committed against Jews in Nazi Germany; and each year on Nov. 11th and 11:00 AM we pause to remember those who gave their lives in wars to secure our freedom.

And the purpose/intention of those holidays and memorials – rather than being about some kind of morbid fascination with death – is that in remembering these important events from the past, we are taught/instructed as to how we ought to live our lives today; that remembering the past helps to inform our present, as well as our future, living.

Well, the exact same thing could be said of the memorials God sets up for His people in our passage today. Last Sunday we looked at the climactic event in Israel’s history of the Passover; the final and decisive plague of death God brought against all the firstborn sons of Egypt in order to bring about the freedom of His people from slavery. And so now, God wants His people to set up these perpetual reminders of that Passover event, in order to make sure that they never forget what they were saved from, and, how that salvation was accomplished; all of which will have a direct bearing on how they live their lives now.

Now maybe that might seem strange to you at first that God would do that. I mean, surely God is just setting up these memorials as a way to regularly celebrate the freedom God’s people now had from slavery, right? Surely God didn’t think that His people would actually *forget* such an epic, life-changing event in their lives! But the sad reality is that God knew that forgetting the Passover was all too real a possibility and – in fact – *exactly* what his people would do without regular reminders of it.

And yet as incomprehensible as that might sound to us, if we’re honest with ourselves, we’d have to admit that we are no better at remembering in our own lives. And that’s hard for most of us to admit b/c – even those of us who *know* we don’t have good memories – *still* think we remember things pretty well. I mean, we even get angry and indignant with people when they suggest that we can’t remember something on our own. “Of course I remembered to bring a change of

underwear for every day of summer camp!!” “Of course I’ll remember to pick up the kids from school!” “Of course I remembered that today is our wedding anniversary!” And in each case – even with evidence after evidence of the fact that we *do* forget – we pridefully respond to these gentle (and sometimes not so gentle) reminders as though our very intelligence were being impugned. “How *dare* you even *suggest* that I don’t have a perfect memory!”

And so the reason why this passage is so relevant for us today is b/c – just like the people of Israel freshly released from slavery in Egypt – the reality is that we forget things (even really important things) *all the time*! We just do! And when it comes to the most important event in our lives – our salvation – even with the best of intentions **w/o intentional, meaningful ways of remembering what has been accomplished for us in the gospel, we can be in danger of forgetting and weakening the gospel’s power to continually transform us.**

Now no, of course, the gospel – which is the message of what God has done for us in Jesus to free us from our slavery sin and death – can *neve*r lose its power. But we can absolutely – in forgetting – fail to appropriate its power in our lives to continue to transform us.

And so in setting up intentional ways of remembering, we are both warned against returning to what we’ve been freed from, as well as motivated to obedience when we consider what it cost to free us. And it’s in remembering that way, that the gospel continues to transform us from day to day.

B/c you see, one of the things you begin to see when you put your faith in Jesus to save you is that – while faith in Jesus does transform us from dead to alive; from slavery to freedom, what it does *not* do, is to transform us from new born babies to fully mature adults. And while salvation is a one-time act of God alone, growing in godliness (or what the bible calls sanctification); that’s a lifelong activity that we partner *with* God in, in order to accomplish. In fact, our partnering with God is undoubtedly the main reason that it takes so long.

And so, in order to see how God helps His people to always remember this moment of redemption in their lives, and how that can help us to do the same thing, we’re going to look at three helps/memorials that God sets up for His people in our passage this morning. So we’re going to see **a *meal* of remembrance, a *sacrifice* of remembrance,** and then finally **a *community*  of remembrance. (x2).**

So, if you’ve closed your bibles, please open them again to Exodus chapter 12:43 and we’ll dig into this together.

Ok, so let’s being by looking at:

1. **A *meal* of remembrance –**

So if you look at **vs. 43** with me, here we see that God is passing on these regulations/instructions through Moses and Aaron as to how the Passover meal – this meal that the people are to continue to eat yearly in remembrance - is to be eaten. Much of vs. 43-50 actually have to do with who is allowed to eat this Passover meal. But if you look at vs. 46 in particular we see some very specific instructions about how the meal is to be eaten. Look at **vs. 46**. Here we read **(READ vs. 46).**

Ok, so this is not at all about God being anti-BBQing or against campfire cooking. If you remember, the reason the meal was to be eaten inside the house *only* is b/c once the lamb was sacrificed and its blood was spread on the doorposts of that home, those inside that home were then covered under the protection of the sign of obedience that the blood signified. If you were to go outside the home, or take the food outside, you were no longer covered under the protection of the blood.

It’s interesting to note too that most scholars agree that this stipulation about not breaking any of the bones of the lamb, actually has no immediate significance to the Passover at all *except* to serve as another future evidence that Jesus was the Lamb that God provided to free us from our slavery to sin and death. In Psalm 34:20 the Psalmist there speaks of God’s protection of His righteous One and that none of His bones would be broken. In the NT, when Jesus is being crucified, the legs of the two criminals on either side of Jesus are broken to expedite their deaths, but when they come to Jesus and see he’s already dead they pierce His side instead and do not break His legs. And then the apostle John writes these words in John 19:36 “*These things happened so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of His bones will be broken,’ and, another Scripture which says, ‘They will look on the One they have pierced.’”*

If you look now into chapter **13 in vss. 3-10**; here is where you see the instructions for the other part of the Passover meal, which was the eating of unleavened bread as well the removal of all yeast from the homes for seven days following. Look first of all at **vs. 3** There Moses says **(READ vs. 3)** So this is where we see that God is setting up this meal for all time as a meal of remembrance; to help the people to always remember the Passover. Look ahead to **vs. 6-7** with me. There God says **(READ vss. 6-7).** So here we see these same instructions that God gave Moses and the people earlier on in chapter 12 as to how to celebrate this **Feast of Unleavened Bread** that will accompany the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. It involves an intentional clearing of the home of all yeast as well as the eating of only unleavened bread for 7 days.

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Now maybe a lot of this seems like review from last week – and in some senses it is. But the thing to notice here is that God is giving these instructions to His people for how they are to celebrate this Passover *after* they have been delivered.

Look at **vs. 5.** Moses tells the people **(READ vs. 5)** So *when* you’ve been freed from your slavery in Egypt; *when* you have settled in the land that God promised to give our forefathers and you have all the time in the world to slow cook a lamb on the BBQ and let your bread rise, it’s *then* that you are to remember your deliverance in this way. Why? *Because that’s the time when you are most likely to forget what happened here today!* When the pressure is off and you’re not looking over your shoulder anymore, *that’s* when you’re going to need help remembering just how blessed you are.

It’s like after you finally buy a new home and you’re all settled into life there, *that’s* when you’re most in danger of forgetting what it was like before living in that one bedroom basement suite with 6.5’ ceilings, one tiny south-facing window, and nothing to cook on but a turned upside down clothing iron. Where you lose that sense of awe and gratitude for all you have and could actually say something like, “Ugh this house sucks!! How can all five of the bathrooms be occupied right now?!”

And so, to keep them from forgetting all they have been rescued from and who is was that rescued them, God sets up this perpetual meal of remembrance that they are to commemorate every year.

And, as we talked about last week, in the NT just before He goes to the cross, Jesus is celebrating this very same meal that God commands His people to celebrate yearly. But, at that meal, Jesus then redefines the whole meaning and significance of the Passover. Jesus says, “Yes, absolutely keep celebrating this Passover meal. But from now on, it will no longer be a meal remembering what God *did* in freeing His people from Egypt; it will now be a meal remembering Me and what I’m *about to do* in freeing everyone who puts their faith in Me from their slavery to sin and death.”

And like all Christian churches around the world, we continue to celebrate that very meal that Jesus commanded us to eat in remembrance of Him, today. In fact, we’ve chosen as a church to celebrate this meal every Sunday in order to make use of God’s gracious gift in providing us a means of always remembering Jesus and what He did; to leave each Sunday service with our all of our senses still ringing from this meal of remembrance. In doing this, we protect our hearts and minds from forgetting the gospel which keeps us continually being transformed by it.

Ok, so that’s **a *meal* of remembrance.** Next let’s look at:

1. **A *sacrifice* of remembrance –**

We see this first of all in **vs. 1-2** of ch. 13. Look with me there. **(READ vss. 1-2).** Now we’ve talked a great deal about the firstborn sons throughout this series and their particular importance in this time and culture. Here we see now God telling the people that they are to now “consecrate” all the firstborn males of both the people, as well as their animals, to God.

Now, to “consecrate” simply means to “set apart for holy use” or even “to make holy by giving to God.” If you look ahead with me now to **vss. 11-13** you can see how God prescribes for His people how to carry out this sacrifice of remembrance. Look there with me. God says through Moses, **(READ vss. 11-13).**

So, first of all, we see in **vs. 11** that once again, God is giving His people this means of remembrance for the future; once they are already freed from their slavery and settled in to this new land God had promised to give them; again, the *very time* when they are most likely to forget what God did for them on this day. Then in **vs. 12** we see God’s instructions about how they are to sacrifice to Him all the firstborn of their livestock: sheep, goats, cattle, etc.

But then, all of a sudden in **vs. 13,** things change slightly. Look again with me there. God says **(READ vs. 13).** So all of a sudden there is this concept of “**redeeming”** introduced. In his commentary on this passage, Philip Ryken describes “redeeming” something as, “to buy back through the payment of a price.” This would make it very similar to the term “ransom”; both of which are used often to describe God’s delivering of the people of Israel out of Egypt.

 And w/o going into a huge description about the Jewish sacrificial system, I’ll simply tell you that there were two types of sacrifices that were ***not*** acceptable to YAHWEH: one was human sacrifice and the other was “unclean” animals, of which donkeys were considered a part. So, b/c they are the firstborn, these donkeys and these children still belong to God; but now, God prescribes for a way for His people to “offer/sacrifice” these firstborn males to Him w/o killing them: He says they can be redeemed/ “bought back” by sacrificing a lamb instead.

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So, what’s interesting about this sacrifice of remembrance is that, on one level, it has nothing to do with delivering God’s people; and yet its *entire* significance is tied *directly* back to the Passover. So, in this sacrifice of consecrating the firstborn back to God, God was giving His people another means of remembering what He had done for them on this day, when they had needed to sacrifice a substitute in order for their firstborn sons to escape God plague of death.

And for you and I today, this sacrifice of remembrance could be tied back to a number of things, but one in particular I want to highlight for us is our personal testimony; which is just the story of how we came to know Jesus.

Now, whenever you have one of those rags-to-riches stories; some punk kid on YouTube gets a record deal; or whatever, what’s one of the first things people always say to those people as they’re driving off in their limo or whatever: *don’t*

*forget where you came from!* In fact that’s the very thing Jennifer Lopez claims she didn’t do in her song “Jenny from the block.”

But when we’re willing to offer up our story - regularly and often as we have opportunity - of who we were before we knew Jesus and who He’s making to be, it has two results:

1. People are drawn closer to Christ as they see a real life, in the flesh, example of the transforming power of the gospel standing there talking to them.
2. We are drawn to remember again *where we came from* and what it cost for God to redeem *us*. Our story reminds us that the Lamb of God needed to be sacrificed in order for us to be freed.

And, listen, don’t get fooled into that line of reasoning where you’d say, “I dunno. My testimony is so boring; I don’t have this story of radical transformation like some other people.” That is not true! Yes you do! B/c according to the bible, before you knew Jesus you were dead, and now you’re alive. Before God saved you, you were under God’s wrath and now you are welcomed as His child! I dunno about you but that sounds like a pretty radical transformation to me!

So, yes, maybe *behaviorally* there hasn’t been this radical transformation if God saved you at a young age or whatever, but your testimony should still cause you to remember; b/c your redemption *still* cost the death of God’s Lamb to purchase.

Ok, so we’ve looked at **a meal of remembrance, then a sacrifice of remembrance.** The last thing I want to show you is God gave His people:

1. **A *community* of remembrance –**

You know how when you were growing up as a kid, lots of times whenever you would complain about something; the food for dinner; the outfit you had to wear; where you went on vacation, or whatever. What is one of the first things our parents would always say to us: *You don’t even know how good you have it!*

I don’t know many of your stories, but I was born into a Shantyman missionary family with two older siblings, where my mom tried to raise us three kids for the first few years of our lives on next to nothing, in a single wide trailer, while my dad would be travelling to different logging camps and backwoods cabins, bringing church to people who had no chance of getting to one otherwise. I remember he would tell me about times when people would be weeping with joy as they were served Communion for the first time in years. But the main point is, we didn’t have a lot in those days to make it on. My parents said missionaries used to send us boxes of clothes! Which explains some of the outfits you’d see us dressed in in those early days.

And later on, when we were older, and we be complaining about something or whining about having to go somewhere, my parents would sit us down and remind us of where we’d come from and how faithful God had been to us in those days. I tell you, that made a lasting, powerful impact on me … until I forgot again.

And if you look in **vs. 47** of chapter 12, and **vs. 11** of chapter 13, you see, first of all, that this meal and this sacrifice of remembrance were to be celebrated as a community; a gathered people all remembering together. And then - b/c within a generation of the Exodus, there would not be any child who knew what it was to be in slavery in Egypt – one of the other means of remembrance God provided for His people was a community.

And we see in **vss. 8-9** and **14-15** in chapter 13, that one of the main purposes of this community of remembrance was to celebrate these means of remembrance with their kids and then explain to them what it all meant. To tell the story of God’s faithfulness in redeeming them out of their slavery in Egypt; teaching their children and – in so doing – reminding themselves again as well.

And if you wonder if this is really all that big a deal; if this isn’t just about passing on “nice traditions” to the kids, you only need to look at the story of God’s people after Joshua leads the people into the promised land, and then, he and that generation later dies. B/c the very next words we read after his burial in the book of Judges 2:10 are these, “*And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work He had done for Israel.”* And the very next words after *that* are, “*And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD …”* That is why this community of remembrance is so vital in the life of God’s people. The next generation who does *not* know what you know, and has *not* experienced what you have experienced, needs to be told what God has done; and they also need to be reminded repeatedly!

So that’s one purpose of this community of remembrance. Another is that this same community is to be both devastatingly exclusive, but also radically welcoming at the same time. And they do that b/c they are remembering!

Look at **vvs. 43-45** and then **48-49.** God says **(READ vss. 43-45, 48-49).** So we see that the community of remembrance is to exclude those who have not received the sign of faith in God, which was circumcision. But, they are also to welcome all who will receive this sign of faith. Look again at **vs. 48.** Anyone who receives the sign of faith may eat the meal of remembrance “like one born in the land” which means like a native born Israelite!

Now, the significance of circumcision points back primarily to Genesis 17. There, God tells Abraham that the sign that will mark God’s people as those who are truly trusting in Him and committed to following the terms of His covenant will be circumcision. Here in our passage, God tells His people that anyone who wants to take part in this meal of remembrance is absolutely welcome as long as they have also received the sign of faith in God: circumcision.

Now, maybe to you and I, that sounds unrealistically restrictive. If I told you, you were more than welcome to come to Eater dinner at our house, but you would have to be circumcised first, you may likely politely decline, even if you had been circumcised already.

But if we think about the point of the meal of remembrance, as well as the significance of circumcision, the restrictions start to not seem so unrealistic. For circumcision was a sign of faith and inclusion into the family of God and the meal of remembrance was about remembering what God did in redeeming His people out of slavery in Egypt. Why would someone who had no faith in God want to remember and celebrate a redemption that they had not themselves been a partaker of?

That’d be like a civilian who’d never served a day in the military wanting to be honored in full uniform on Remembrance day.

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And as we roll all this into the context of today: if we’re saying that the meal of remembrance is the Lord’s Supper, then the modern day community of faith is the church; that *this* is the place where together we remember what it cost God to free us and where we also teach future generations about what God did to save us.

And, if you didn’t know, this is also one of the reasons that each week when we eat this meal of remembrance together, that I ask those who have not put their faith in Jesus, and demonstrated that faith publicly by being baptized, to *not* partake of the meal with us. The reason is b/c – just as circumcision was the sign of faith and inclusion in the family of God in Moses day – so now baptism is the demonstration of our faith as well as of our inclusion into the family of God today.

And the celebration of this meal of remembrance is so important and so significant, that in the NT, Paul actually tells the church in Corinth that some of the people there have died from eating this meal of remembrance in an unworthy manner; which is just to say that they are seeking to celebrate a redemption that they have not themselves received.

But, just as in Moses’ day, this is not some exclusive, super-secret club meal that God’s people want to keep others from enjoying. On the contrary, this is a meal we want *many* more to eat with us; to come to faith in what Jesus did to save you, and then, to truly eat this meal as a means of remembering what it cost God to redeem you; the death of the Lamb that God himself provided in sending Jesus.

**Conclusion**

In the end, the big idea is that God is giving His people these helps, really, so that they will remember to remember. And as we’ve looked at some present day equivalents: those things like taking Communion and the telling of our faith stories, they have the same intended result in our lives of drawing us constantly back to the gospel and helping us remember to remember.

And remembering, as we’ve seen, is so very important b/c all of us are prone to forget; not just a few times, but over and over again. Remembering what we’ve been saved from and who it is that has saved us helps us in so many different situations:

* When we’re faced with oppression or opposition from people, remembering Jesus’ victory over our greatest enemy helps us not to overly fearful.
* When we gather together, or even alone, remembering all that God has done for us, leads us to praise and worship Him in our singing and our prayer and our giving.
* When we’re feeling tempted towards sin, remembering reminds us of what it cost God to free us from that sin and motivates us to turn from it.
* Or, when we have given in to sin, remembering also reminds us that Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins was sufficient and we are no longer under God’s wrath. And we know that b/c of what we saw last week; that Jesus’ resurrection confirms that God accepted Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf.

But for all the benefits and helps that remembering truly brings, do you know what the one thing is that remembering can’t do; what it didn’t do for God’s people then, and can’t do for us today? **Save us.**

You see, every other sacrifice God commanded, accomplished something: either redeeming of a child or atonement for sin. But this Passover sacrifice which God says His people are to keep year after year, is unique in that it is *solely* commemorative. We see that explicitly in **vs. 3** of chapter 13. So that means when Israel sacrificed a lamb or cleared all yeast out of homes year after year, it didn’t save Israel *again* from Egypt; they were already free. That one sacrifice, on the night of the first Passover, bought their freedom.

And the very same thing is true for us today. The author of Hebrews tells us in Heb. **10:11-14 (READ Heb. 10:11-14).** This shows us once again how the Passover pointed to Jesus as the Lamb that God would provide and that His one sacrifice was sufficient to cover all of our sin for all time. That’s why there’s nothing

we need to add or contribute to our salvation; it was accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus for all time. The command for God’s people then – as well as for you and I now today - is simply to remember to remember.

