

Coach House Church

BEACONS

REMEMBER WELL

25TH MAY 2021

What was your favourite birthday present two years ago? Unless it's odd, flashy, useful, or a treadmill cluttering your garage, it's likely to fade into the other 'stuff' you've accumulated over the years. Good gifts embed themselves in our lives but are easily forgotten, not least the good things God has done for us – so let's take the opportunity to look again.

First off, to satisfy your curiosity, I honestly can't remember one gift I received 2 years ago. I might use it every day and not know. I have a vague impression one was a mug with a meme printed on the side of it. That fits the odd category. I know at some point I received a useful running jacket for my birthday which I've used hundreds of times in the last 4 years. On a different note, I have Christmas shower and shaving kits that I'm still working my way through 2 years on. And no flashy gifts I'm afraid.

Obviously, it's hard to be thankful for things that you can't even remember. They may be great, they may be doing you a world of good, but if you don't remember, how can you be thankful? When the Israelites had finally got clear of Egypt, stopped their faithless wanderings and come into the Promised Land, they are offered this warning:

"10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

It's a snippet from Deuteronomy 8 from verses 10-14, and the whole chapter is a reminder to remember. They had received the land, and so much more along the way – being spared the plagues, rescued from slavery, given manna and meat to eat in the desert, had the sea open up for them and swallow the Egyptians behind and many other miraculous deeds. How could they ever forget?

However, God is not naïve. He knows that over time, the gifts we receive are naturally taken for granted. They form the new status quo and we can't remember life without them. The gift is a reality experienced daily; the rescue is a fading memory which happened long ago. One is in the present, the other is gradually consigned to the past. How could the Israelites fix this problem? And how can we fix this problem today?

The solution offered is to praise God and keep practising his ways to avoid pride. This passage concisely tells them to "praise the LORD your God" and also "do not forget the Lord your God." And 'forgetting' looks like "failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees". They had festivals, sacrifices, rituals and commands to follow which would keep them actively remembering God. They should maintain practices that prevent forgetfulness and encourage them to praise God so that their memories of God's work don't slip away in the grip of prosperity.

This can happen in very simple ways. For example, I was anxious about lots of things at the beginning of last week, and it was set to be very stressful few days. I prayed and gave it all to God, and miraculously, each thing I prayed about was fixed in a day. The contrast between the stress and relief couldn't be greater. Even so, that relief lasted seconds, and then it was back to normality in my mind, just like it was before the stress began. Peace reigned once more. I realised at that moment that I had to forcibly recall what God had done and the things he'd fixed. I had to focus on it, or I'd forget it. Yes, it was fixed simply, but it was only fixed simply because nothing is hard for God. There is a famous and more extreme example in Luke 17:11-19 where 10 lepers cried out to Jesus and were healed, however, only one came back to thank him. For the others, it was enough to return to the peace and comfort of normality without dwelling on the magnitude of what God did for them.

Forgetfulness feeds pride, but remembering what God has done for us feeds humility. Why bother with humility? In the case of the Israelites, and in my personal example – it's just being a realist who knows the power of God. They didn't get their land out of nowhere; it came via God's miraculous power and commitment to

them. My circumstances didn't just 'work themselves out' God fixed them and offered bright new solutions to my problems. I'd just be dishonest to disagree, and they'd have been fools to think they earned the beautiful land they entered. Skip forwards a few thousand years, and God offers anyone who cares to listen the most brilliant gift of all - the gift of a transformed, thankful, hopeful life that lasts forever through Jesus. Romans 6:23 puts it like this: "23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in[b] Christ Jesus our Lord." Without Jesus, we're heading for destruction and we can't earn or bargain our way out of that mess. But, the beautiful thing is that we don't have to, because Jesus fixes our relationship with God and sets us on the road to recovery.

The Christian life starts as a gift from God and it continues as a gift from God. If we humbly remember all God has done for us and continues to do for us, we'll grow in our faith and grow in thankfulness. If we keep ourselves in church, in the Bible and in prayer, we'll put ourselves a place where we won't easily forget him. Let's dust of that gift and discover it's value.



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