



“Remember”
Nehemiah 9

Idea: Forgetfulness leads to estrangement, but remembrance leads to relationship.

Intro: Joseph woke up one morning to the filth and stench of an Egyptian prison just as he had on many other mornings. The difference on this particular day was that two of his fellow inmates were deeply troubled by the dreams they had during the night. Pharaoh had been angry with both his cupbearer and baker, so they had been thrown in prison.

Joseph was a worshiper of Yahweh. He was the son of Jacob, the grandson of Isaac, and the great-grandson of Abraham. He believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had visited him in dreams as a teenage boy and told him that he would be raised up to a place of prominence and authority (Gen 37:5-10). Those dreams, however, had not yet come true. In fact, the opposite had happened. His brothers jealously sold him into slavery (Gen 37:10-36). Joseph landed in Egypt, where Potiphar, who was the captain of Pharaoh’s guard, purchased him. He excelled in Potiphar’s house, and things were looking up until the day he was falsely accused by

Potiphar's wife and sent to prison (Gen 39). In prison he found favor with the warden and was given authority over all the prisoners. When he found the two inmates troubled over their dreams, Joseph sought to help them. They told him their dreams, and he interpreted them. The cupbearer would be restored to his position in service of Pharaoh, but the baker would be executed. Both dreams became a reality. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when he was restored to his service (Gen 40:14), but Joseph was forgotten for two whole years (Gen 41:9-13). Can you imagine what it must of felt like for Joseph to be forgotten? Surely, the cupbearer remembered Joseph once he was back in the palace. Surely, he saw Joseph as his friend. Surely, he intended to say something about Joseph to Pharaoh, but there never seemed to be a right time to do so. Days passed into months. Months passed into years, and little by little the cupbearer forgot about the man who had helped him in prison. Joseph had become nothing more than a stranger to him.

Forgetfulness is daunting. C. S. Lewis, after the death of his wife, Joy, wrote of the despair and spiritual twilight he experienced. Part of the agony Lewis felt was the fading from his memory of her appearance. He began to forget what she looked like. He couldn't quite recall, and it filled him with a sense of betrayal and a deep anguish of soul. In some way she was becoming a stranger to him.

When we forget, we live as strangers. Forgetfulness leads to estrangement, but remembrance leads to relationship. All throughout the Bible we see the dangers of man's forgetfulness as well as the beauty and blessings of remembrance.

Inquiry: In Nehemiah 9, the Jews in Jerusalem determined to remember. Read verse 1. They remembered:

- *Who they are* (Neh 9:1)
The first day of the seventh month was a holy convocation (Feast of Trumpets). The tenth day of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement. Beginning

on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the Jews celebrated the Feast of Booths for seven days. Then the following day was a solemn assembly. This brings us to the twenty-fourth day of the month. This was not a fixed event dictated by the law. It appears to have been a grassroots movement directed by the Levites.

Nehemiah tells us the people of Israel fasted and humbled themselves before God. They acknowledged their dependence on God and humiliation for sin. They recognized who they are by seeing themselves as sinners in need of grace.

- *Whose they are (Neh 9:2)*
They separated themselves from worldly things in order to be separated to their God because they were God's redeemed people.
- *The priority of worship (Neh 9:3-5)*
The people had gathered around the Word of God. They began reading it on the first day of the month, and it quickly pierced their hearts and revealed their sin. The centrality of God's Word led to confession and praise.
- *The sovereignty of God (Neh 9:6)*
They remembered God is not one among many or best among the candidates; He is sovereign – the One and only. He alone is the Creator of all there is. Nothing exists outside the expressed desire of God, and nothing can continue without His provision.
- *The righteousness of God (Neh 9:7-8)*
The Jews remembered that God exhibits His magnificence not only in the wonder of His creation and in the power of His rule but in His desire to form a relationship with mankind. He chose Abram. God shook hands with a nomad and made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the

Canaanites. The Jews inherited the land not because of anything they had done but because God is righteous. He is dependable.

- *The salvation of God* (Neh 9:9-12)
God is not aloof from His creation. No, he observes and watches. The Jews remembered that God sees the plight of His people and works to save them.
- *The provision of God* (Neh 9:13-25)
God is the initiator who approaches man to give everything needed. The Jews remembered that the Lord had made provision for their spiritual, social, political, and physical welfare.
- *The pattern of sin* (Neh 9:26-31)
They acknowledged the faithfulness of God in the midst of their sin and rebellion.
- *The grace of God* (Neh 9:32-37)
The Jews remembered that their God was great, mighty, and keeps His covenant of love. Despite their sin, they dared to place their hope in the grace of God.

Forgetfulness on the part of Israel is what estranged them from God. They forsook and forgot God's Word. They had become and done everything that Moses warned them about in Deuteronomy. As a result they lived as strangers to God, while their sins piled up and enclosed upon them.

Have you noticed how quickly things accumulate in your life? Laundry never ceases to amaze me. You wash your clothes one day, and it seems like you turn around and have to do it all again the next day. The same is true of dirty dishes. They're always piling up in the sink. You're constantly taking the trash out, sweeping the floor, and clearing out the clutter. The same is true of your transgressions. They are ever accumulating and piling up around you. Imagine it as massive – big as the

amount of time you have spent in this life, dense as the frequency of your thoughts – and what you have is this massive, dense weight of guilt hanging over your head, threatening to crush you at any moment. And the only thing keeping it off you is the mercy of God.

The Jews remembered God. As they stood on the first day of the month and heard from the Word of God, their hearts were broken over their sin. They remembered that their God was holy, righteous, and true. And they remembered that it was not God, who walked away, but they and their ancestors who forgot the covenant. They remembered that God is loving, compassionate, and longsuffering. They remembered that they were prone to wander and idolatrous. They remembered God's goodness and His desire to forgive and redeem. They remembered that their waywardness was overshadowed by God's love.

It is here in this beautiful scene of confession, repentance, and redemption that we learn three things when confronted with our sin:

1. Remember to stand on the mercy of God.

For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them. – Deut 4:31

God is good. He wishes that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). Over and over in the Bible we see the testimony of God is that He is merciful. No matter how great your sin may be the Bible says that God desires to forgive it.

When you feel the weight of your guilt and shame...when you feel the weight of your mistakes...when you feel the sting of conviction, remember God. He is merciful. The condemnation you feel is God's gift to you. It opens your eyes to the

reality of the sin that has estranged you from your God. So stand on the mercy of God. Believe that His mercies are new every morning. Believe that He loves you. Believe that God desires to be in relationship with you. Though Israel had forsaken God in the wilderness and even made an idol to replace Him, God in His mercy never forsook them (9:19).

2. Remember to own your sin.

These Jews discovered what Job and Isaiah had discovered. A personal encounter with God creates a more alert sensitivity to sin. God's holiness exposes our impurity, His generosity censures our greed, His faithfulness challenges our disloyalty, and His love un.masks our self-centeredness. They were broken over their sin (9:1-2). Their brokenness and conviction led to the confession of it to the Lord.

Their confession was sincere. It was accompanied with fasting, sackcloth, dirt on their heads, and separation from worldly people. They behaved and dressed as grief-stricken mourners, agonizing over their transgressions.

Their confession was specific. They didn't hide behind vague phrases and hollow language. No, they itemized their sins, spelling them out in ugly detail. Throughout their history, they had been arrogant toward God (vs. 16). They were disobedient and forgetful (vs. 17). They were rebellious (vs. 17). They had cast God aside as they casted an idol in the fire (vs. 18). They had rejected God's Word and killed His messengers (vs. 26). They had not learned from the pattern of sin in their lives (vs. 28).

Their confessions were specific sins that Israel had committed against God in the past, but these Jews understood the sins were also illustrative of the sins in

their present lives. Those sins had not been left behind in the distant history. No, they had been passed on to each and every generation in a legacy of disobedience and disloyalty. For this reason, the Jews specifically confessed their sins. They recognized that in confession the universality of sin should never obscure the particularity of the offenses. If we are to appreciate the wonder of God's forgiveness, our sins need to be identified as the distinctly individual, personal, and damaging transgressions they really are, and not mechanically lumped together in some ritualistic phrase at the beginning of a formal prayer. We must name them honestly before God as we ask that they might be washed away. Only then will we admit their seriousness and acknowledge their shame.

“A general confession is good, but in it lurks the danger of acknowledging and bemoaning humanity's sins and not your own.” – Georgia Harkness

3. Remember to rest in the grace of God.

But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. – Neh 9:17b

As you remember that God has a proven track record of being merciful toward sinners and as you own your sin by confessing it specifically to Him, you need to rest in His grace...His unmerited favor. Mercy is you not receiving what you deserve...judgment. Grace is you receiving what you do not deserve...forgiveness.

Solomon asked God to be gracious to His people when they confessed their sin and sought His face.
Read 2 Chron 6:36-39; 7:13-14.

God is not obligated to forgive sin. It doesn't even make sense for Him to forgive sin. But He does. He

promises to forgive our sin. He even promises to do more than forgive our sin; He will heal the brokenness in our lives that sin has created. This is why we rest in the glorious grace of God.

Conclusion: All throughout the Bible we see a recurring theme being played out...the flight from God. Running alongside that we see another theme...the pursuit of God. These parallel themes are also true of the history of mankind. Every person is running from God, but the Hound of Heaven is on the trail of each one.

Israel testified to the ever-pursuing Hound of Heaven who chased after them (vs. 17, 19). Look back over your life, and you will detect this same relentless pursuit of God's grace.

God the Son stretched Himself out on the cross and took the weight of your ever-accumulating sin upon Himself. In mercy He endured the wrath and shame of your sin. Today, if you will remember God, own your sin, and look to Him like the Jews did then you too will experience the glorious grace of Jesus and the relationship He desires to have with you.