

Remembering God – A Message for Memorial Day **By Phil Brainerd**

Introduction

In the United States, on the last Monday of May, we set aside a day to remember: Memorial Day. We remember and honor those who have served in our military. In the course of events of world history, sadly, there have been times when nations have needed good people to defend them on the battlefield. The men and women who rise to that need are special people. They are willing to put their lives on the line to protect family, friends, and a way of life. In particular, we remember and honor those who have paid the ultimate price for protecting us.

To all who have served in the military, and to those who have lost loved ones in battle, we say: “Thank you.”

Remembering is important. It’s important for a nation to remember those who serve and sacrifice. Remembering is also important for the people of God. Remembering is an important theme all throughout the Bible. What I’d like to do today is to look at a time when the people of God were told to remember. I’d like to talk about the benefits of remembering. We’ll also talk about the problems presented when people forget.

How do you remember God? Today we’ll discuss three important categories of remembering.

I. Remember what God has done in the past

The first thing we need to remember is what God has done in the past. In our message today, we’re going to be looking at a time in the lives of the children of Israel. God freed them from bondage in Egypt. They wandered in the desert for a long time. Now, they were ready to enter the promised land. Here’s what Moses said to them at that time:

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. (Deuteronomy 4:9)

Look at that: “...do not forget...” In the mind of Moses, the great man of God, it was important for the Children of Israel to remember something. What was it? “...the things your eyes have seen...”

What did they see? More about that in a minute. Before we learn about that, let’s ask another question: How important was it that they remember?

Moses commanded them to be careful. They were to watch themselves closely. So, this was important! They were not to let these things fade from their hearts. For how long? For the rest of their lives. In fact, it's not sufficient for these things to be remembered only for a lifetime. They were to teach these things to their children and to their children after them.

The children of Israel were to remember something, and it was very important. They were to remember forever.

Now, back to the question: what did they see with their eyes?

A. Slavery

They saw slavery in Egypt. They didn't just see one kind of slavery. They saw two kinds of slavery. First, the kind of slavery where people are controlled by whips and chains. That's terrible. But they were also surrounded by slavery to false gods. All around them they saw idols. They saw the people of Egypt bowing down to their idols. The Hebrews were taught to believe in one God. They must have been constantly pulled by temptation.

So, the children of Israel saw slavery with their own eyes. But then they saw something much more: They saw God work through Moses. Before coming to Egypt, Moses spoke with God in the burning bush. Here's what God told Moses:

7 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians..." (Exodus 3:7-8)

God told Moses that he saw the misery of his people. How could God do that? Because is omnipresent - He is present everywhere in the universe. Nothing escapes his view.

More than that, God heard the people cry out. He hears the cries of his children. And he didn't hear only -He saw their suffering. He saw their misery. And, he was concerned about their pain. Why? Because God is kind and compassionate. He didn't say, "Gee, look at all that pain. What a shame! What else is on the TV?" No. He said, "I have seen their misery, and I am concerned."

And finally, God didn't just sit around feeling bad. He said, "So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians..." God had the power to do something about what he saw and heard. So, he used his great power for his children. If you ever saw the "Ten Commandments" with Charlton Heston, you know a lot of the story. God showed incredible acts of power against the Egyptians.

Now, something that Mr. Heston didn't mention in the movie was the effect this had on the Egyptian gods. We said that the children of Israel witnessed slavery to false gods. The Egyptians had gods for all kinds of things. For example, they had a god named "Hapi". He was the god of the Nile River. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile, along with what they believed to be its god. However, at the command of the true God, the Nile was turned into blood. This should have shown any thinking person that the God of Israel was greater than the supposed god of the Nile.

One of the mightiest of the Egyptian gods was Ra, the god of the Sun. However, he was about to be beaten. At the command of God, there was darkness all over the land of Egypt - Darkness so thick, you could not see your hand in front of your face. But where the children of Israel lived, there was sunshine - Sunshine as full as you would hope for on a vacation at the beach. The God of Israel showed himself to be stronger than the supposed god of the sun.

Then there was Osiris, god of the underworld. This god controlled who entered the realms of death - And occasionally who might come back out. You can imagine that such a god would get a lot of attention. At least, until the real God came along. At God's command, the firstborn children of all Egypt were taken. From the lowest all the way to Pharaoh's son. No amount of prayer to Osiris could bring anyone back.

Finally, there was the parting of the Red Sea. The children of Israel walked through as though it was dry ground. Things didn't go so well for Pharaoh's army.

So, what did the children of Israel see? They saw the attributes of God. He is all seeing and all knowing. He is kind and compassionate. He cares about his children and their pain. And he is powerful - More powerful than all the false gods put together. He is more powerful than nature. And he alone has the power of life and death.

The children of Israel saw all this, and much, much more. They were to remember God and the things he had done.

So, remembering involves God and the things he has done in the past.

II. Remember God's promises

Next, the people of Israel were told to remember what God will do in the future. Of course, this is also known as his promises.

...be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden.
(Deuteronomy 4:9)

What is “The Covenant”? This is talking about the Law of Moses. And of course, it wasn’t really from Moses - It was God’s law given through Moses.

Here’s something important: God made a number of covenants. He’s made a lot of promises over the years. The law of Moses is only one of them.

The law is complex, but you can state it simply: 1) There were things that Israel was supposed to do. 2) And there were things that God would do. Here’s one of the things that God said about it:

4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ (Exodus 19:4-6)

God says several things here: If Israel obeys, they will be God’s treasured possession. That means they will be highly privileged. They will be a kingdom of priests. Why is that important? A priest is someone who has access to God. There is nothing more valuable than him. Israel will have more of God than anyone else on the earth.

God promised a lot of things to Israel, but two things stand out: They both begin with the letter, “P”: Provision and Protection. God provides for his children. God protects his children. There are specific statements about these things all over the Scripture, but let’s just stick with what we just read:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt...”

Egypt was one of the most powerful nations on the planet. And God subdued them for Israel. In other places God restates that he will happily go out before Israel and give them victory in battle. God can protect his children against the most powerful armies in the world. He tells his children to remember that.

“...the whole earth is mine...”

If God considers you to be special, and he owns everything, then you get a piece of everything. God is able to provide for his children - Everything they truly need. He tells his children to remember that.

At this point, we need to ask the question: What happens when people forget these things?

First, God tells us on a high level:

...do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden.

When people forget that God has promised to provide for them and protect them, they go elsewhere.

It's a scary world out there. It always has been. All over the world, people have met their fear by concocting false gods - Statues. They're not real. They don't work. But people try anyway. God tells his people not to do this.

We've discussed this at some length in our church, so let's just quickly summarize. As I said earlier, there are still people all over the world who do this. More about that in a bit. Today, most people in the western world are past that. We don't build statues and worship them.

I like to call this concept: "Statues and Stuff". In the old days, people worshipped the statues because they wanted stuff. They wanted food and shelter and protection from enemies. Over time, many figured out that the gods thought to be represented by the statues weren't real. But those people still want the stuff. So, today, we give stuff the energy and time and we would otherwise give to God. We have activities that provide stuff. Sadly, those activities displace activities that involve worshipping and serving God.

The apostle Paul writes about it:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5)

When people forget the promises of God, they get themselves into all kinds of bad activities. So God tells us to remember his promises, the things he will do in the future.

There's one last thing God's people need to remember:

III. Remember that God will remember.

Remember that God will remember. Let's read about it:

For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath. (Deuteronomy 4:31)

When people choose God: He does not abandon them. He does not destroy them. He does not forget his promises. He remembers. There's a word for that: "Faithful". That's another attribute of God - He is faithful. The prophet Jeremiah tells us:

22 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
23 They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

(Lamentations 3:22-23)

God does not forget his promises. He does not forget his people. His people must remember that.

IV. What does this mean for us today?

Having learned all this, what does this mean for us today? It means lots of things, but let's focus on a few. We started by looking at the way that God told his children to remember the things they saw with their own eyes. They saw slavery: Slavery to whips, and slavery to false religion.

But they also saw God's concern for them. They saw his attributes: His love and compassion His great power. They saw that he could rescue them.

Today, we don't see exactly the same things that they saw. Some of the promises that God made to them are not fully for us. However, many of his promises are. In fact, there are some new promises.

False religions

Today, although we don't see everything they saw, we see some of the same things. For example, we are surrounded by people entrapped by false religion. As I mentioned earlier, our friends in the Hindu religion worship veritable armies of idols and false gods. That's why we have sent missionaries into the world to share the gospel with them. Because of that, many have been saved. They moved from slavery to freedom in Christ. We want to remember our missionaries and their work.

Many people of the Hindu faith have come to America. They're our neighbors and co-workers. They need to hear the gospel so that they can be freed. We need to remember that God is powerful, and that he is merciful and gracious. He wants us to share our faith with everyone: Far and near so that they can be freed from slavery to false religion.

Sinful habits

Today, we see people entrapped by sinful habits. Some are enslaved to drugs and alcohol. I've heard great stories of people who were freed when they learned of the power of Christ.

Fear of death

Some are enslaved by fear. Let me share some of my own story here. Way back in 1979, I was riding on a plane between Philadelphia, where I grew up, and the state of Indiana, where I went to college. There had just been a big plane crash only a few weeks before. As my plane rose off the runway, I wondered: What would happen to me if my plane crashed? Friends had been sharing their faith with me, so I invited Jesus Christ into my heart as my Lord and Savior right there on the plane. I got off the plane, found an old Bible, and the rest is, as they say, history.

I realized at that moment that I was afraid of death and the following judgement. After that moment, I was no longer afraid. I was freed from the fear of death by Jesus Christ. Since that time, my life has been full of before and after moments. One minute, I didn't understand something. The next minute, God showed me the answer.

It helps me when I remember the good things God has done in my life. It also helps me to remember that he has not done these things because I deserved it. God does good things in peoples lives as a free gift from his generous heart.

Personal Application

Do you have any before and after moments in your life? As always, we have two kinds of readers.

First, some have never received Jesus as their Savior. So, they can't point to a "before" and "after" moment. If you receive Jesus as your Savior, you don't ever need to fear death. This is a new promise that Jesus made to the world. Here's what the apostle John says:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)

Did you know it's possible to know with certainty that you have eternal life? John says it is! The new promise comes through the cross of Jesus. Would you talk with us? We'd like to help you to have your first before and after moment. One moment, you're not sure of where you'll go when you enter eternity. The next, you know for sure. We'd like you to know with certainty that you have the eternal life that Jesus Christ offers to us. There will be important contact information at the end of this article.

For all the folks who've already done this: God encourages us to remember what he has done in our lives. He encourages us to remember his promises. Do you have before and after moments? They're a very important part of our testimony. Take some time. Think about it. Let God's Holy Spirit lead you through memories. Ask him to help you remember the good things he's done in your life.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

On this Memorial Day, let's stop and remember those who have served our country. Let's take a moment to be thankful for their service and their sacrifice.

Let's also remember that remembering is an important principle in the Bible. Remember the great things God did, as recorded in the Scripture. Ask his help to remember the good things he's done in your life.

Remember that God will do good things in the future. He promises to protect and provide for his children. Remember that so that we can all avoid getting involved in dubious activities and other kinds of idolatry.

And remember that God remembers. He is faithful. He keeps his promises.

If you remember these things, it will change your life.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:
PeaceWithGod.net