



## How Soon We Forget

Isaiah 40:21-31  
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An 80 year old husband and wife were having problems remembering things, so they decided to go to their doctor to get checked out to make sure nothing was wrong with them. When they arrived at the doctor's, they explained to the doctor about the problems they were having with their memory. After checking the couple out, the doctor tells them that they were physically okay but might want to start writing things down and make notes to help them remember things. The couple thanked the doctor and left.

Later that night while watching TV the old man got up from his chair and his wife asks, "Where are you going?" He replies, "To the kitchen." She asks, "Will you get me a bowl of ice cream?" He replies, "Sure." She then asks him, "Don't you think you should write it down so you can remember it?" He says, "No, I can remember that." She then says, "Well, I also would like some strawberries on top. You had better write that down cause I know you'll forget that."

He says, "I can remember that, you want a bowl of ice cream with strawberries." She replies, "Well, I also would like whip cream on top. I know you will forget that so you better write it down." With irritation in his voice, he says, "I don't need to write that down, I can remember that." He then fumes into the kitchen. After about 20 minutes he returns from the kitchen and hands her a plate of bacon and eggs. She stares at the plate for a moment and says, "You forgot my toast."

Memory is the process of cognitively maintaining information over time and it is an absolutely fascinating study. Many years ago a group of motorcycle pals and I picked up a riding partner at his home in Warren to head out for a trip. About five or six years later we rode out to pick him up again before realizing we didn't have a map or directions. But we decided to venture forth and see if we couldn't get there by memory. Wouldn't you know that after all those years, and only having made the trip once before, we found his place without much problem at all. Imagine what this brain is recording for future reference day in and day out over the course of a lifetime. That is amazing.

Imagine all that changes when an accident or illness or simply the advancing years begins to affect our ability to record and retrieve new information. Not too long ago my

brother went to visit our mother in the memory unit of her assisted living facility. He asked, "Do you know who I am?" She responded, "No, but I sure am glad to see you!" I find a strange comfort in that she cannot remember that she cannot remember. She is just as chipper as ever, and for that we are grateful.

While crossover country singer Glen Campbell is slipping into Alzheimer's disease his ability to perform has remained intact. His latest song, "Not Going to Miss You," was nominated for two Grammy's, including Best Country Song. He sings it for those he loves with gratitude that, in the end, his illness will at least spare him of missing them. He sings: "You're the last person I will love / You're the last face I will recall / And best of all, / I'm not gonna miss you / Not gonna miss you."

The loss of memory is sad, and that goes for the loss of spiritual memory. The title of our message for today is "How Soon We Forget." How soon we forget the timeless spiritual truths of the Bible given as a lamp for our feet and a light for our way. That is one of the reasons God has made provision for a Sabbath Day of rest. Not only do we need rest from the myriad demands of day-to-day living, we need to be constantly reminded about things like forgiveness, loving our neighbor as ourselves, and trusting God lest we forget in all of life's distractions.

In our text God's people are being reminded of some basic spiritual truths they have apparently forgotten. These reminders are coming from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah's prophecy is better understood as a school of prophecy in his name. There was the original prophet Isaiah who sounded the warning to a wayward Israel. If Isaiah's people did not turn back to God, they would cut themselves off from his protective and providential care and be vulnerable to the hostile and militarily superior surrounding nations.

Did the people listen to Isaiah? No, and for that failure they were defeated by their enemies and exiled as a slave race to their captors in the latter's homeland. After the exile, and after Isaiah passed away, a new prophet arose for a new day. We don't know his name, but he prophesied in the line of Isaiah—as a continuation of his prophetic ministry. His prophecy begins in the 40<sup>th</sup> chapter and marks a dramatic change in tone. Whereas the first 39 chapters sound a note of wrath and judgment, the 40<sup>th</sup> chapter continues with a note of comfort and reassurance.

Why? Because the Jews, once so hopelessly prideful, have been humbled and recognize their need to return to God (aka, repentance). That is exactly what God has been waiting for, and he now promises through the prophet to liberate his people once again—this time from their bondage to the Babylonians—and to restore them to their homeland. That's great news for a slave race without a country—if they dare to believe it.

Look, they have been so demoralized for so long. A new generation among them has arisen that has only known servitude. Their collective self-image is not so hot. Beyond all that, are their captors just going to let them go? And if they did, with what resources

would they make their long journey back to restore their fields and rebuild their homes and reestablish their cities—even the capital city of Jerusalem with its defensive walls thrown down into rubble? “I mean it sounds great and all but, realistically speaking, how do we overcome all the obstacles?”

To these defeated voices among the people the prophet responds: *Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?* (Verse 21). How soon we forget! *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:41). Can the Egyptians? Can the Philistines? Can the deprivations of the desert wilderness? *With God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26). All this we have been told from the beginning. Read the scrolls!

*Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing* (including the rulers of our captors). *No sooner are they planted, not sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff* (Verses 21-24).

Could the mighty Babylonians be swept away like chaff? You better believe it, and so they were when the Persians, under King Cyrus, swept in and swept them away. And not only that, he decreed that the Jews should be allowed to return to rebuild their homeland. Kings and empires come and go, but the Word of the Lord stands firm forever. And so does God’s covenant with his Chosen People—the people who look to him in faith.

*Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by my God”?* (Verse 27). Well, I guess after landing in the big mess they created for themselves, and suffering the consequences of their sin, and praying to God in their distress and not getting an immediate response, they figured that God was no longer paying attention or that God no longer cared. Hey, the Lord works in mysterious ways and not always according to our timetables. But the Lord definitely works if folks give him the chance.

For emphasis the prophet repeats his incredulous questions: *Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom* (Verse 28). How soon we forget. The sacred story recounts over and over again how, with his miraculous wonder-working power God saves the weak and weary who turn to him in faith. How can you read the scriptures and miss that? How can you forget that great, good news?

*He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow*

*weary, they will walk and not be faint* (Verses 29-31). Sometimes God's people just need to be reminded of what they so easily forget—that God has not written them off and that he will save them in his time and way once they return to him in faith.

What about Glen Campbell? What about my Mom? What about that aging couple who can't remember ice cream from bacon and eggs? I'll tell you an interesting thing about folks like that. I have gone to lead worship in facilities specializing in dementia. You walk in and have to wonder why you are there. Nobody can understand what you are preaching. But as Hans Christian Andersen put it: "Where words fail, music speaks." Once we begin singing the old hymns of the faith, like we will soon sing "How Great Thou Art," these folks perk up and sing from a memory so deep and indelible that it defies dementia. Go to YouTube and search for "dementia singing" and watch the experience of Gladys Wilson and Naomi Feil.

None of us are going to live forever, and none of us is going to be the picture of health forever. We age and, ultimately, we pass from this realm. One day Glen Campbell will pass from this realm and be transported to realms on high, there to await the arrival of those loved ones he has known and loved. They won't find each other diminished in body, mind or spirit for they will be glorified in unimaginable ways—ways not given us to know right now.

All we need to know is that *He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak*. And he doesn't only do that at the last hour when we breathe our last. He does it in the here and now, just as he did it in the then and there for Israel. Are you exiled from the Promised Land right now? Are you demoralized by the seemingly intractable mess you are in? Are you weak and weary? Are you wondering if God might have disregarded your cause?

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?* How soon we forget. And that is why it is good for us to be here in God's house regularly—to be reminded of the greatness of our God who transcends the changing fortunes of this world. As the prophet reminds us in our text: *Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name*. Let's sing a hymn that reminds us to do just that.