

Psalm 119:49-56

Remembering God's Word

Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope – v. 49

As we've been noticing different points of emphasis in each section of this Psalm we see in our present section an emphasis on remembering. In v. 49 the Psalmist calls upon God to remember his word. In v. 52 we read *I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself*. And in v. 55 we read *I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law*.

This is the only section in this Psalm that contains the word *remember*. It's not the only Psalm, however, that contains this word. In Ps. 25:6 the Psalmist calls upon God to *Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they [have been] ever of old*. In the very next verse the Psalmist makes known something he wants God to remember and something he doesn't want God to remember: *Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD*.

In the 77th Psalm there is an emphasis on what the Psalmist himself remembers. *I remembered God, and was troubled*, he says in v. 3. *I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed*. This negative effect of the remembrance of God was countered by the Psalmist by further remembering. So we read him saying in vv. 10,11 *And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old*.

In Psalm 143:5 we find 3 different terms with similar meanings coming together to make a point of emphasis. *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands*. Remembering, meditating, musing – these three terms come together to emphasize the practice of thinking on God's word. I'm afraid that this is a practice and a discipline that is largely lost among God's people today. We count ourselves to be spiritual if we manage to keep up with our Bible-reading schedules. But to actually read the word and call it to remembrance in order to think upon it? Who has time for that? We're much too busy for that.

Philip Henry, the Father of Matthew Henry makes the remark that *It is easier to go six miles to hear a sermon, than to spend one quarter of an hour in meditating on it when I come home*. You have to bear in mind that in the days of Philip Henry going six miles to hear a sermon would have been a major effort. It would have been done by horseback or on foot. And what he is saying in effect is that as hard as it might be to make such a long and strenuous journey to hear a sermon it would prove to be easier than spending 15 minutes thinking about a sermon.

Listen to this definition of meditation given to J.I. Packer. This statement is something in itself that could call for a good deal of reflection. He writes that *Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various*

things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. He also says on this subject that Meditation is not giving free rein to your imagination, nor is it reading your Bible for beautiful thoughts. Meditation is a discipline.

Perhaps this is why it's such a neglected practice today. It's a discipline that takes time and must be developed. In a day when our culture promises us instant results for anything we want, engaging in a time-consuming practice is definitely counter-cultural. I'm making a connection this morning between meditating on God's word and remembering God's word. You might say, based on the definition I just cited from J.I. Packer that remembering the word is the beginning of meditation. It is that process of calling to mind the works and ways and purposes and promises of God.

I want to call your attention to that theme this morning. The theme of:

Remembering the Word of God

And I want to focus on this theme in such a way that you might be challenged and guided into taking up what is largely a lost discipline in our day. Consider with me, then, first of all:

I. The Substance of Our Remembering

When I make reference to remembering the word of God – what exactly does that mean? What in particular are we to remember? This section of Psalm 119 gives us a number of things to remember. You could say, based on v. 49 that we're to remember the word of God. *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope*, the Psalmist prays in v. 49.

Now I don't want to be exegetically imprecise here. I recognize that in this verse the Psalmist is calling on God to do the remembering. And I intend to deal with that aspect of the verse in the course of our study. But, by the same token, when the Psalmist is talking about the word upon which God has caused him to hope, he's certainly referring to that which he himself remembers. It would be foolish, indeed, to call upon God to remember something that we ourselves don't remember.

And so by implication from this verse you could say that the thing we are to remember is the word that we in which we hope. Or, in other words, we're to remember – call to mind, or meditate or muse upon the promises of God. We did a study a few weeks ago in our afternoon service about the promises of God. We took the time to enumerate the exact things that are promised by God. And those promises include such things as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who is the author of all spirituality is promised by God. And this is a promise, with all its ramifications that applies to our children. It was when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost that Peter concluded his sermon by saying that *the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call* (Acts 2:39).

Christ himself is given to us in accordance with God's promise. Ac 13:23 *Of this man's seed hath God according to [his] promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.* The gospel comes to us in accordance with God's promise. Rom. 1:1,2 *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,).* Life is given to us as a promise. Paul writes to Timothy in 2Tim. 1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.*

These are the things that God has caused us to fix our hope. And they are things, therefore, that are well worth calling to mind or remembering. But the promises are not the only things we're to remember. So in v. 52 we see the next thing that forms the substance of our remembering. *I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD.* The judgments of God are worthy topics to bring to our remembrance. And it's really quite impossible to read the Bible or to read history, for that matter, and fail to come to the conclusion that God is a God of judgment and that the nations in the past have been judged which indicates to us clearly that we cannot anticipate that the nations that reject God and reject Christ and reject the gospel will be judged.

Stop and think about it for a moment. Following creation judgment came upon Adam and Eve for their sin. The very existence of death bears testimony to the truth of God's judgment. We have the account of God's judgment in a universal flood upon the world. We have the account of God's judgment by fire and brimstone upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. We have the account of God's judgment upon the Egyptians for their idolatry and their oppression of God's people. We have the account of God's judgment upon the inhabitants of Canaan when the Israelites were given the land. They were not given that land until the sin of the Canaanites was full.

We have the account of God's judgment upon the Israelites following generations of the longsuffering of God. Thank God that in the midst of his judgments God has always remembered mercy. Adam and Eve were not immediately put to death. Noah was saved when the world was destroyed. Lot and his family were allowed to leave Sodom before the city was subjected to God's wrath. And a remnant of Jews surrendered to the Babylonians and their lives were spared when God dealt severely with the nation of Judah.

Here is a subject that ought to be called to remembrance – the judgments of God. And, of course, Christ's death on Calvary's cross ought to come into this category of judgments as well. Christ was judged in our place. There is no condemnation to us because there has already been condemnation to Christ. So God's judgments of old along with the promises of God are things that make up the substance of our remembering.

But there's more yet. In v. 55 the Psalmist says *I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law.* Here is a topic of remembrance that is vast and deep and really quite beyond us and ought to take much of our time in our thinking – the remembrance of God's name. When I was in Grand Rapids for the Puritan Reformed Seminary Conference earlier this year, I came across a book that was written for children. I

bought copies of it for my Grandchildren. The book is entitled *The Names of God*. I read the first chapter of the book a while back to my Grandkids. I hope that they'll continue the study. I never realized it before reading that chapter that there are more than 700 different names that can be applied to God. God's name, you see, is not simply a badge by which he's identified. God's names speak of his attributes. Each name is a separate lesson in theology.

One of my favorite Old Testament passages is where the Lord honors the request of Moses to behold his glory. In the manifestation of that glory we read how the Lord proclaimed his name. Listen to the words of Exod. 34:5-7 *And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*

Clearly then there is much substance to our remembering. When you consider the promises of God, the judgments of God and the name of God I dare say that these are subjects that you need never fear exhausting. And these are things that we need to call to mind. The absence of the discipline of remembering will leave us unstable, lacking in assurance, lacking in confidence, vulnerable to being tossed to and fro by every passing cultural and theological and politically correct whim. We must give ourselves to the practice of remembering. May we make it our resolution that we will remember God's word and God's judgments and God's name. And may the time come when we'll be able to honestly confess, as the Psalmist does *I have remembered thy name, O LORD*.

The importance of the issue becomes all the more magnified when you consider next:

II. The Time of Our Remembering

The times that are referenced throughout this Psalm and certainly in this section of the Psalm that we are now considering are the difficult and the trying times. Look at the words of v. 50 *This is my comfort in my affliction*. And in the next verse, v. 51 *The proud have had me greatly in derision*. Another English version puts it this way: *The arrogant utterly deride me*. The reference is to being scoffed at and mocked.

And the picture gets even worse when you add v. 53 *Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law*. *Hot indignation seizes me* another version reads. *Burning indignation has seized me because of the wicked, Who forsake Your law* – still another version reads.

When you look at these statements taken together, then, the picture that emerges is not exactly a picture of a millennium. It's a picture, rather, of affliction and scoffing and ridicule and mocking to the point where there's a reproach to be borne for believing the truth of God and his Word. And there's a sense of rage and indignation within that arises

from a jealousy of God's honor. This is the time, then, when God's word must be called to remembrance – during times of affliction and derision when scoffers and mockers are bold in their skepticism and unbelief – so bold that we feel our reproach and a burning indignation arises within our souls.

I don't think I need to tell you that these are exactly the times in which we find ourselves today. I listened this past week to a question and answer time that was taking place at an Expositors Conference for preachers. Al Mohler, the President of Southern Seminary in Louisville Ky., was taking the questions and one of the questions put to him came from a Pastor that wanted to know what Pastors and Christians needed to be warned about in terms of religious and theological trends.

Dr. Mohler listed 5 things. He began with the literal view of the Genesis account of creation. The attacks against such a view will continue and will become bolder. You will be viewed as simple and naïve and out of step with science by holding a literal view of the Genesis account. I was happy to hear Dr. Mohler tie the truth of that Genesis account and especially tie the view that Adam is a true historical figure to the gospel. This is exactly what Paul does in Rom. 8 and 1Cor. 15 recognizing, as Paul does that Christ is the second Adam.

The next thing Dr. Mohler said was that it would not be long before many supposed Bible scholars will cave to the pressure of viewing the sin of Sodomy as something that is normal and not sinful. There is already tremendous pressure to do this and we will soon know who believes the Bible and who does not. The next thing he mentioned was the exclusivity of the way of salvation. It goes against the grain of the political correctness of our modern culture to suggest that Jesus is the only way of salvation. It's regarded as too narrow and too cruel to say that Muslim and Hindus need to be saved.

Dr. Mohler then noted that the doctrine of justification will continue to be attacked in such a way as to suggest that we must contribute something to it. And that the doctrine of sanctification will be attacked in such ways as to accommodate all our worldly and fleshly desires. He didn't use the phrase but it was apparent to me that he was talking about the abuses of Christian liberty and he specifically identified this trend with the Reformed camp.

Truly the Psalmist, in this section of Psalm 119 is identifying a day that is exactly as the day in which we live. These are not easy times. These are times of affliction and derision and burning indignation on the part of the children of God – which means, of course, then, that these are days especially that call for the remembrance of God's promises, and God's judgments, and God's name. This ought to be a cause of real concern to us as Christians because if we're not careful about it we can become vulnerable to despair by the times in which we live. These things I've just described that were enumerated by Dr. Mohler can so dominate our hearts that we're pulled down and we become bitter in our anguish and we lose out with God.

The difficulties of the times in which we live may be one of the contributing factors as to why the promises and judgments and names of God are not thought upon as often as they should be. We have a greater tendency to view the remembering of God's ways and word when we feel we have the luxury of being able to do so.

I referenced a saying a moment ago that drew a contrast between the discipline of meditation with reading our Bibles for beautiful thoughts. Reading our Bibles for beautiful thoughts is something we consider to be a luxury. How wonderful those rare times appear when everything is in order enough to allow us to take time to do our Bible readings slowly and contemplatively.

Those rare times, however, are not the times that are being referenced by the Psalmist. It is during the times of affliction and during the times of derision and during the times when horror takes hold of us and we burn with indignation – it is during those times especially that we must devote ourselves to remembering God – his will and his ways and his purposes and his promises. I dare say that our well-being as Christians and the survival of our families and our marriages and our children are, in a sense, contingent upon whether or not we'll heed the Psalmist's example of remembering.

This matter of survival and going on with God becomes even plainer to see when you consider my last and final point which is:

III. The Effects of Our Remembering

We've seen the substance of our remembering, the time of our remembering – let me close now with just a few thoughts on the effects of our remembering. An understanding of these effects will certainly demonstrate the need for us all to be engaged in the practice of remembering.

Note again the words of vv. 49,50 *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.* The first effect of remembering God's word and God's ways is that it brings comfort to the believer's soul. *This is my comfort* he says and note the circumstance in which the Psalmist draws that comfort – *This is my comfort in my affliction.*

Do you catch the Psalmist's meaning? We don't have to be disquieted and perplexed and downcast and in despair in the midst of oppressive circumstances. We can be comforted which is tantamount to saying we can be at peace and rest. We can maintain our stability – indeed we can maintain our sanity when the world would have us in derision.

In trying to think of an example of a man who is comforted in the midst of affliction my mind was drawn to Stephen in the book of Acts. You know the story. Stephen preached Christ to the Jews in such a way that they became incensed with him. When Stephen was accused of blaspheming the Jews religion we read in Acts 6:15 that *all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*

In the chapter that follows Stephen is very straight-forward with that council. He reminds them that the history of Israel was a history of rejecting God's word and persecuting God's

prophets. In the end Stephen is stoned to death but even in his execution I don't believe he ever lost that countenance of an angel. He was able to pray for the forgiveness of his tormenters and he asked God not to lay the sin of his death to their charge.

Here is comfort in the midst of severe affliction, then. And this comfort becomes your portion and my portion when we remember the word upon which God has caused us to hope. It's remembering the promises of God, then, that brings us comfort.

We can also tie into this line of thinking the remembrance of God's name. Remember that the names of God describe for us the character of God. We know that God will be true to his promises because we know God is faithful. This same effect of comfort is revealed to us again in v. 52. *I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself.*

You have in this statement yet another example of the practical value of theology. God has proven himself to be a just and righteous God. The history of civilization is the history of God's judgment. So by calling this truth to our remembrance we are able to gain the confidence that God will vindicate his word and his ways. God will vindicate his people. He will vindicate his cause of redemption. The world may scoff and mock and heap reproach upon God's people. And this time of reproach may, at times, seem to be long and the enemies of the gospel relentless.

When horror takes hold upon you because of the wicked that forsake God's law then it's time to call to remembrance God's judgments of old. And it's time to consider that the delay of judgment is not because God is indifferent to sin or powerless to do anything about sin. According to Peter, in his second epistle, we are to account that the longsuffering of God is due to salvation. God still has a purpose of grace. And according to Paul the longsuffering of God is a manifestation of his goodness that ought to lead men to repent. So when you find yourselves burning with indignation over the ways God's laws are banned and sin is sanctioned then call to mind God's judgments of old and call to mind the name of God and call to mind the promises of God that you may be enabled to calm yourself and gain the patience you need and avoid being pulled down to the depths of despair.

There's another effect of remembering given to us in vv. 50,51 *This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. The proud have had me greatly in derision: And now here comes the effect of remembering yet have I not declined from thy law.* Steadfast obedience of faith is another effect that springs from remembering. This is brought out again in v. 55 *I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law.* Perseverance is the fruit of remembering.

You begin to perceive, I hope, how important this practice is. The difference between comfort or despair – the difference between being dominated by hot indignation or being dominated by Christ's love is contingent upon remembering God's will and God's ways.

If I could quickly add one more effect of remembering. It has the effect of prayer and praise. I mentioned in my introduction that in v. 49 the Psalmist is calling upon God to

remember his word. This is true praying in the will of God. We remember God's word and call upon God to remember his word. Would you note also from v. 54 *Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage*. Songs depict praises. The remembrance of God's will and God's ways and God's word will lead us to songs of praise.

What an important practice this becomes, then, of remembering. I think it would be fair to say that our comfort and peace and joy and stability all hinge on utilizing this practice. By remembering God's word and ways our anchor holds even in the midst of affliction when our souls are seized with horror. Without utilizing this practice of remembering we become so much more vulnerable to the depths of despair.

I have to confess that from a Pastoral perspective this is an area that does concern me regarding our church family. I know that many, even most of the people in this church keep up with what's taking place in the world. And that's fine. I don't believe Christians are suppose to be those that stick their heads in the sand and become oblivious to what's going on around them. I don't believe that we're suppose to adopt a kind of monastic mentality that seeks to build walls between ourselves and the world and then says to the world *you leave me alone and I'll leave you alone*.

No – we have a mission to accomplish within this world. We are to advance Christ's kingdom within this world. But when your soul becomes dominated by all that is wrong and sinful in this world you lose the ability and the patience for carrying out that mission. The solution is found in remembering.

So remember the word of God – remember the promises of God. Remember his judgments of old. Remember his name – his character – his love and his grace and his mercy and his justice and righteousness. Remember these things that you may be steadfast in your obedience and that you may be comforted in your affliction. May God help us all to remember.