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WHEN YOU FEEL FORGOTTEN BY GOD

Genesis 8:1-22

By

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Genesis Lesson 18

When You Feel Forgotten By God Genesis 8:1-22

Have you ever felt forgotten by God? Once in a while you hear a heart-wrenching story of a child who has been abandoned by his parents. Well, thankfully, God never abandons His children. But probably you've *felt* forgotten by God at times. You prayed, but God didn't answer. You read the Bible, but it didn't speak to you. The trials in your life made you think that God went on vacation and forgot about you and your problems.

Noah may have felt like that after being on the ark for a while. The whole world had been destroyed by the flood. The rain had beat down in torrents upon that lonely ark for 40 days and nights. Finally, the rain stopped and the only sound was that of the water sloshing against the sides of the ark. Noah probably expected to hear from the Lord about then. But if God spoke to Noah, the Bible doesn't report it. When God finally speaks to Noah again, telling him to come off the ark (8:15), the impression you get is that He hadn't spoken since the last time recorded in the text, over a year before, when He told Noah to get on board (7:1).

What do you suppose Noah was thinking during all that time on the water? At times he probably felt forgotten by God. Maybe you're there right now. You need assurance that God hasn't forgotten you. That's what Genesis 8 is all about. We read words of hope in verse 1: "But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark." Not just Noah, but the animals! It reminds us of Jesus' words that the Heavenly Father's eyes are on each sparrow, so you know that He cares for you. And while the Lord remembered Noah, we see Noah waiting patiently and obediently in the ark until God tells him to go out. Then Noah offered a sacrifice to the Lord. So the two themes of Genesis 8 are that God remembers Noah and Noah remembers God. We can apply it by saying:

Since God in faithfulness remembers us,
we by faith must remember God.

The dominant theme of the chapter is that:

1. God in faithfulness remembers us.

When the text says, "God remembered Noah," it does not imply that somehow He got busy with other things and Noah slipped from His mind for a while. Then something reminded Him and He snapped His fingers and said, "Noah! I forgot all about him down there!"

Rather, in the Bible the word is used often of God in the sense of God taking action on His promises. When God was about to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He "remembered Abraham" and spared Lot on his behalf (Gen. 19:29). When Rachel wanted to bear children, but could not, we read that "God remembered Rachel" and she conceived (Gen. 30:22). When Israel was in bondage in Egypt, we read that "God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exod. 2:24). When Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit, she praised God who remembered His mercy as He had spoken to Abraham and his offspring (Luke 1:54-55). The penitent thief on the cross asked, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). In every case, the idea is the same: God remembers in the sense of taking action on His promises.

So here, God remembered Noah and those on the ark. It points to God's faithfulness. From our point of view, it may seem that God has forgotten. Perhaps He has been silent for a long while. But He will act on our behalf in His time. He remembers. He is faithful to those who are His. God's faithful remembrance is seen in three ways in Genesis 8: in His past salvation; in His promise of future preservation; and in His present provision.

A. God's faithful remembrance is seen in His past salvation.

God's past salvation is seen in the ark. Noah and everyone on board the ark had been spared God's judgment. It was not a luxury liner, but those on board were safe. As Noah and his family felt the ark come to rest on the mountain, even though God was yet silent, they knew one thing for certain--by God's grace they had been spared His awful judgment. If you have trusted in God's only means of salvation, the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, even if

God seems silent at the moment, you can rest assured that you are safe in Jesus Christ.

A man once came to D. L. Moody and said he was worried because he didn't feel saved. Moody asked, "Was Noah safe in the ark?" "Certainly he was," the man replied. "Well, what made him safe, his feeling or the ark?" The man got the point. It is not our feelings that save us. Christ saves us by His sovereign grace, and if we have trusted in Christ, we know that God in faithfulness to His promise has saved us from His judgment.

When it seems like God has forgotten you, stop and think about the salvation God has granted to you in Jesus Christ. It is not based on anything in you. Noah found grace (6:8), and so has every person who has trusted Christ as Savior. John Newton, preacher and author of "Amazing Grace," was a drunken sailor and slave trader when God saved him. He wrote a text in bold letters and put it over the mantle of his study, where he could not fail to see it: "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee." Newton wanted to remember God's faithfulness as seen in His past salvation.

B. God's faithful remembrance is seen in His promise of future preservation.

As he came off the ark, Noah must have had some mixed emotions. On the one hand, he was grateful for God's deliverance. But on the other hand, he must have felt a bit apprehensive. God had wiped out every other person and all other animals on the face of the earth. Noah must have thought, "What if we disobey Him? Will He wipe us out?"

But those whom God saves, He keeps. Our final preservation doesn't depend on our grip on God, but on God's strong grip on us (Jude 24). It doesn't rest on our great faith, but on His great faithfulness. In 6:18, God said to Noah, "I will establish My covenant with you." While this is the dominant theme of chapter 9, God mentions His promise here in 8:21, when He vows never again to curse the ground on account of man or to destroy every living thing as He did in the flood.

Note that God's promise of sparing the earth from such severe judgment is not conditioned on Noah's or anyone's obedi-

ence. In fact, God promises to do it in spite of man's sinfulness. The Hebrew word translated "for" (8:21, NASB) can be translated "though" (see Josh. 17:18, "though"). So God is saying, "Even though I see that man's heart is still the same [the flood did not eradicate man's sinful nature], I will look ahead to the atoning sacrifice of Messiah and will spare the earth and its inhabitants for Messiah's sake."

Aren't you glad that your future deliverance from God's judgment depends on God's faithfulness, not yours? While those who truly know Christ will be growing in obedience, there isn't a saint who has a perfect track record. Satan likes to come and say, "You claim to be a Christian? Look at your sins! How can you possibly expect God to save you?" At such times of doubt, I have to say to Satan, "I'm not trusting in my track record to commend me to God. I'm trusting in the faithfulness of the God who has said, 'Their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more' (Heb. 10:17). I'm trusting in His Word which declares that 'He who began a good work in [me] will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus' (Phil. 1:6). So, Satan, if you can disprove God's faithfulness, I'm in trouble. But if not, be gone! You have no basis to trouble me."

Thus God's faithful remembrance is seen in His past salvation and in His promise of future preservation of His people from judgment. But also,

- C. God's faithful remembrance is seen in His present provision.

God had provided all that Noah and his family needed to survive, both on the ark and once they set foot on dry ground again. The earth again sprouted with vegetation, as seen in the olive leaf in the dove's beak. (The olive tree can sprout even under water.) The olive leaf showed Noah that the water had greatly subsided, since olive trees grow at lower elevations than where the ark came to rest.

God's provision is also seen in that He had instructed Noah to take seven clean animals on the ark, rather than just two. He used one of the seven for his sacrifice (8:20). But in 9:3, God ordains that man may now eat meat. Thus the clean animals provided

food for the survivors of the flood until they could grow new crops and until the animals multiplied.

God's provision is also seen in His promise (8:22) that "while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." We often forget, as A. W. Pink put it, that "behind Nature's 'laws' is Nature's Lord" (*Gleanings in Genesis* [Moody Press], p. 113). God gives us many reminders of His faithfulness: Each new day, every changing season, and the food we eat should remind us that He is a faithful God who provides for all our needs.

Genesis 8 reminds us of the creation account in Genesis 1. In both accounts, the earth is covered with water. In Genesis 1 the Spirit moved; here God caused the wind (same Hebrew word as "Spirit") to blow. In both accounts the dry land is separated from the waters, vegetation sprouts and the earth is prepared for man. Both chapters show us God's gracious provision for His creatures.

Often when God is silent in our lives, it's because He wants to bring us into a situation where He makes all things new. But sometimes He has to destroy the old before He can remake the new. But we can count on His faithfulness during the silence, knowing that He has saved us in the past, He has promised to preserve us in the future, and He is providing for us in the present. Noah clung to those assurances when God was silent for that long year in the ark. You can cling to those assurances right now, if it seems as if God has forgotten you.

So first we see God's remembrance of Noah; we also see Noah's remembrance of God. Since God in faithfulness remembers us,

2. We by faith must remember God.

Noah's remembrance of God is seen in three ways in this story, ways we can imitate as we seek to remember the Lord.

A. We remember God by trusting in His salvation.

Noah obedient faith is seen in his building the ark and by getting on board when God told him to. If he hadn't trusted God's word by doing that, he wouldn't have been delivered from the flood.

God has provided Jesus Christ as the “ark” which will carry you safely through the judgment to come. Just as Noah had to believe God by building the ark and getting on board, so you must believe God by “getting on board” Christ as the only One who can deliver you from God’s judgment. In the world’s eyes, the ark was Noah’s folly. But in God’s plan, that which was foolishness to the world was His means of salvation. Even so, as Paul said, “The word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). If you have never by faith entrusted your eternal destiny completely to Jesus Christ, laying hold of His death in your place, you must start there.

B. We remember God by waiting patiently and obediently for God’s timing.

Once God has saved us, like young children, we want everything instantly. We want all our problems solved now. We want answers to our questions now. But God shapes us by making us learn to wait on Him. After a year in a crowded, dark, smelly ark, Noah must have had a bad case of cabin fever. But we find him patiently and obediently waiting for the Lord to give the word. God didn’t dry up the water instantly, but used the wind and other natural processes. It took time. That’s usually how God works.

Finally Noah sent out a raven. Ravens will alight on anything, no matter how foul. Perhaps it landed on carcasses floating on the water, and fed off them, but it never returned to the ark. Next Noah released the dove. Doves want a clean, dry place to land. Not finding such a place, the dove returned. Noah kept waiting. Seven days later, he tried again. This time the dove returned with an olive leaf. Noah waited seven more days. This time the dove did not return. Still Noah waited. In the 601st year of his life, on the first day of the first month, the water was dried up (8:13). Still Noah waited. Finally, on the 27th day of the second month, God told Noah to disembark (8:14-16). Only then did Noah leave the ark.

God had shut Noah in; God must bring Noah out by His command. Noah kept waiting on God even when God was apparently silent. Obedience during the silent times is the best guarantee that you’ll obey God in those critical moments which determine the course of your life. If God has shut you in to some difficulty,

wait patiently and obediently upon Him to bring you out in His way and time.

Maybe God has shut you up to being single, but you want to be married. But God doesn't seem to be listening to your prayers. If you disobey God and take matters into your own hands by dating unbelievers, you will thwart what He is trying to teach you about waiting on Him and you may miss His provision for you later. In the silent times, we must remember the Lord by waiting patiently and obediently for His timing.

- C. We remember the Lord by offering a sacrifice of gratitude.

Noah got off the ark and offered a sacrifice to the Lord. You may think his action was a matter of course. But it was hardly a matter of course. Noah would have been a busy man once he set foot on dry ground again. He had to build a shelter for his family. They had to tend to the domestic animals. They had to move everything off the ark to their new homes, and there was no Bekins! And yet Noah took time to remember the Lord by building an altar and offering sacrifices.

Noah's sacrifice showed that he still must approach God through shed blood. Noah wasn't presuming on some new privileged relationship with God since he had survived the flood. He still knew himself to be a sinner, and he offered sacrifices as the only way he could approach a holy God. Noah's sacrifice also was an expression of gratitude for God's salvation. Noah knew his own heart. There was no reason God should have spared him, but He did. And so Noah expressed his thankfulness with this sacrifice.

In the same way, God wants us to remember Him by coming to Him through the blood of Jesus Christ as our only basis of approach. He wants us to reflect often on our deliverance from judgment, and to "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Heb. 13:15).

One of the ways God ordained for us to do that is through the Lord's Supper (also called the "Eucharist," from the Greek word for thanksgiving). When we come to the Lord's Supper, we reflect on His salvation for us in the past; on His promised coming and the future salvation we will enjoy; and on the present provision

He has given us for life and godliness. We remember Him and give thanks for His salvation.

Like Noah, most of us have a million other pressing things we could be doing with our time. It's so easy to get busy with life and forget the Lord and His blessings to us. Forgetting, we grow ungrateful. And ungratefulness leads us away from God. We must guard against thankless hearts by regularly setting aside time in our busy schedules to remember the Lord and the great salvation He has granted us. Since God in faithfulness has remembered us, we by faith must remember Him.

Conclusion

At times we've all felt abandoned by God. The nation Israel felt that way. Isaiah wrote, "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me.'" But God answers, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you" (Isa. 49:14-15). God remembers His children. Even when He seems to have forgotten us, we, His children, can rest on His faithful Word and obediently remember Him.

Frances Havergal, the hymn writer, could have felt forgotten by God. She died in her early forties. On the last day of her life, she asked a friend to read Isaiah 42 to her. When the friend read the sixth verse, "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee," Miss Havergal stopped her. She whispered, "Called; held; kept. I can go home on that!" And she did go home on that, resting in the faithful remembrance of her God. One of her best loved songs is, "Like a River Glorious." The third verse reads,

Every joy or trial falleth from above,
Trac'd upon our dial by the Sun of Love;
We may trust Him fully all for us to do;
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.

It was true for her; it has been true of every one of God's elect, whom He has faithfully remembered. If you know Christ, it is true of you, even when God seems to forget you. You can trust Him and find Him wholly true.

Discussion Questions

1. Tell of a time when you felt forgotten by God. What did you learn?
2. Why does God make us wait on Him? How can we know whether God is telling us “no” or “wait”?
3. What would you say to a person who felt that God was unfaithful because He did not answer prayers to heal a loved one?
4. How can we build more gratitude into our lives?

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