

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Special Messages</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Text:</b>	<b>2 Peter 1:12-15</b>		Gary L. W. Johnson
<b>Date:</b>	<b>December 29, 2019 (a.m.)</b>		

### THINGS WE MUST NEVER FORGET

In this opening section of Peter's second epistle, we find the apostle's resolutions, two of them to be exact. To begin with, he resolves to "always be *reminding*" them of the truths stated in the immediate context. Next, he resolves to "make every effort" to see that after his death they will "always be able to *remember* these things." Peter was well aware of the tendency we all have as sinful human beings to forget. "But men are men," as Shakespeare has put it, "the best sometimes forget." We all have sung the words of Robert Burns *Auld Lang Syne* . . . "Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?" And yet we do forget. How quickly we forget great people, great events and great truths. I am not simply referring to awkward and uncomfortable moments when we run into an old acquaintance and can't remember his name, or, worse yet, when we forget that today was our wedding anniversary. The forgetfulness I have in mind is captured by Ecclesiastes 9:14-15. "There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man." Many a great and noble person has suffered such a deplorable fate. But, then again, is it not the case, that we tend to forget things that we consider unimportant? We remember the things that we esteem and we forget those things that we do not value (forgetting your wedding anniversary more than once could lead your spouse to that conclusion!). The Bible even refers to the sin of forgetfulness. How can forgetfulness actually be referred to as sin? Psalm 106:6, 7 explains: "We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly. When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea." Forgetfulness led to unfaithfulness. The Psalmist links this forgetfulness to a lack of understanding and a failure to appreciate what God had done. In Deuteronomy 9:7, God reminds His people of this very same incident and charges them to remember their forgetfulness! Now this will, no doubt, strike us as a strange thing to do, because we prefer the kind of counsel that is echoed in the line from a song by Barbra Streisand, "What's too painful to remember, we simply choose to forget." Sounds good and, besides, this advice is frequently heard from the pulpit, and there is no shortage of books in the average Christian bookstore that play this tune. We are confidently told that remembering our own troubled past with all our failings and weaknesses produces only guilt, and this is bad for our self-esteem. It only serves to halt the healing process our fragile psyche so desperately needs and will likewise frighten our wounded inner-child. God, the great therapist in the sky, we are assured, surely doesn't want us to remember such unpleasant things, does He? On the contrary, He does. For example, in Ezekiel 16:22 and 43, God rebukes His covenant people for not remembering their past, and then in verses 61 and 63, He declares that the day is coming when they will remember and will be ashamed. This note is played in the New Testament as well. In Revelation 2:5, the church at Ephesus is instructed by the glorified Christ to "Remember the height from which you have fallen," and in 3:3 the church at Sardis is given a similar exhortation. Paul's admonition to the Gentile Christians in Eph. 2:11, 12, is likewise a call to graphically remember their past condition. Peter's call to remembrance is repeated three times in this passage, and this is made all the more emphatic and solemn by the apostle's reference to his approaching death.

- I. **PETER'S PRINCIPLES.** There are a number of principles that can be gleaned from this passage of Scripture. They are general points, which are of great value not only to the Christian, but can and should be used when dealing with non-Christians.
  - A. **The Difference Between Being Aware of Something and Really Knowing It.** Note Peter's language in verse 12 (compare with James 4:17).
  - B. **The Memory Needs to Be Stimulated** (verse 13). The word translated "to refresh" in the NIV is the infinitive form of *diegeiro*, to wake out of sleep, to stir up. The preposition in compound is perfective, so that the actual meaning is "to stir up or wake up thoroughly."<sup>1</sup> (The same word appears in 3:1, where it is translated "to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.")
- II. **PETER'S CONVICTIONS.** What are the great things that Peter wishes to rehearse with his readers?
  - A. **Life Itself.** The Bible never likens human life to that of animals. We are created in the image of God. We are not the product of random chance. Life has purpose and significance. But life is short, and all of us must, like Peter, depart this life.
  - B. **The Nature of Life.** Life is more than physical existence. We live in this world in a body and we experience life through our bodies – but the body is a kind of tent. Why does the apostle speak like this? I think it is to underscore the reality that this body and this world will pass away.
  - C. **The Whole Purpose of Life.** What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. We need to be constantly reminded that we are here to do more than simply gratify our physical needs and find self-fulfillment and personal happiness. We have to give an account to our Creator (Hebrews 4:13).

**CONCLUSION:** Peter is not exhorting his readers to live in the past. He is not urging them to live simply by memories. As Martin Lloyd-Jones has observed, "that is an attempt to walk forwards looking backwards at the same time, and it is something that is wrong in and of itself."<sup>2</sup> Remembrance, in the biblical sense, is more than simply a recollection. Peter is calling his readers to actively engage their minds so that they understand and, therefore, do not forget. "The business of the church and of preaching is not to present us with new and interesting ideas, it is rather to go on reminding us of certain fundamental and eternal truths."<sup>3</sup> Finally, listen to the counsel of John Calvin, "It is not usually given to us to foresee our end, but those who are given intimation of the shortness of their life by such indications as advanced age or failing health ought to spur themselves on more eagerly to carry out in good time what the Lord has laid upon them. Indeed even those who are in the most robust health and who flourish at the prime of their years, and who yet do not give God such daily obedience as is to be desired, ought to provoke themselves to the same kind of solicitude by remembering the approach of death, so that they do not miss the opportunity of doing good by giving only negligent and thoughtless attention to their work."<sup>4</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> M. Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons On 2 Peter* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 57. Listen to the advice of the old Scot, John Brown: "There is something very far wrong in a Christian teacher's estimate of his duties and responsibilities, if he can be heard, even for a very few Sabbaths in session, without putting his hearers in mind of the great elementary principles of Christian faith and duty, by which both saints and sinners are most likely to be stirred up – the things whereby men live, and in which is the life of the soul." *2 Peter: Parting Counsels* (rpt. Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries XII* (Eerdmans, 1974).