

Introduction - Failure

I can't do anything right. I'm a complete failure... That guy is such a failure... That was an epic failure... All of us know what it is like to fail – to be a failure! All of us have wondered if we do anything right.

Standing at the edge of the track, Molly Huddle lamented, “21 years of running, nutrition, hard work and dedication; and all of it lost in a moment.” Recently, at the Track and Field World Championships, at the end of the 10k, American Molly Huddle was nearing a surprising third place finish. On the final straight away, she wouldn't catch the two leaders, but she saw a third place within reach. Over the last lap, she had opened up a few second gap back to the 4th place runner. And when she was about 15 meters from the finish, she eased up, and raised her arms in celebration of the moment she had dreamed of her entire life. But, as she crossed the finish line Molly was passed by a runner who was sprinting to the end, taking advantage of Molly's premature celebration. Molly Huddle had finished 4th by one tenth of a second. She had celebrated too early. Maybe, for a moment, she was engaging in self-worship, anticipating the roar of the crowds, the high fives from her teammates, but instead with her arms held high in celebration a moment too soon, Molly grabbed defeat from the jaws of victory. In her own words, “it is painful to watch.” And with the wonder of television and YouTube, now the whole world can watch Molly's pain over and over again... See, Molly had forgotten to run the race to the finish. She had forgotten the many lessons she had learned while training. She had forgotten that it's not over till it's over. And that moment of forgetfulness led to a deep and painful failure.

Our passage this morning, chronicles the failures of Israel. It is a hall of shame for the people of Israel... a window into the faithlessness of God's people, sharply contrasted with the faithfulness of the love of God. Israel engaged in an ongoing cycle of failure, repentance, obedience, failure throughout the Old Testament. But, how did they get there? What happened? Answer: They forgot. They forgot God. They forgot his faithfulness. They forgot his love. They forgot his promises. Have you ever forgotten God? You don't have to answer, because we all know the answer. When you fail it is often because you did not

remember God. You did not remember God's faithfulness. You did not remember God's love. And you did not remember his promises. As we will see this morning, the Psalms give us a language of remembrance. Psalm 106 chronicles the path from forgetfulness to remembrance.

I. We Forget

Remembering is not just about looking through family photo albums or going through Instagram or Facebook timelines. It is not simply sitting around a campfire at a high school reunion and harkening back to the days of old. It is more than, "Didn't she look cute?" Remembering is more than an action of the mind. It is also an action of the will. When you *recall* that you have neglected to make an important phone call, you have not truly remembered until you *respond* by actually dialing the phone. The words most often used for remember in both the Hebrew and the Greek involve both recall and response. For Israel remembering was a physical action that God's people did together. And when Israel forgot God and his wondrous works, their lives fell apart. As we see in our passage, Israel (and the church today) demonstrated its forgetfulness with **ingratitude** and **impatience**.

How many times have you forgotten to be thankful because you were too busy complaining about what you didn't have? How many times do you whine because YOU know what you need more than anyone else, even God? Many of have had this conversation with our children at home at least once a week. "Now, let's try and think about all of the ways God has been good to us every day. Let's thank God for our toys, our friends, etc." But, where have they learned to complain and not be grateful for the many blessings they have been given? Mom and Dad of course. They have two adults living in their house who at times are perfect models of ingratitude. Why does our heating system keep breaking? Why is the transmission in our car going bad? Why can't we eat at a fancy restaurant? God's people have a long history of forgetting his abundant generosity and resorting to the idolatry of ingratitude. Remember Israel! God, could you alter the diet in the wilderness a bit? Could we get a little more water down here? Meanwhile, they have forgotten that God has been providing manna and quail, in a "cloudy

with a chance of meatballs” style, for years. God has been sustaining them and giving them life in a life-less desert.

Our forgetfulness also manifests itself as **impatience**. God just doesn't seem to work on our schedules. And, sometimes it gets us angry. We are often like a squirming child having trouble sitting still during church, or a 16 year old in line at the DMV. Waiting is not our specialty in 21st Century America. One of our biggest struggles is not allowing the dull and mundane parts of our lives to overwhelm us bringing us to a constant frenzied search for a new car, new electronic device, a new anything. We become restless, wondering if God will ever fulfill his promises. Verses 19-23 of our passage allude to story in Exodus when Moses is on Mount Sinai receiving the tablets of the covenant from God. It is taking a while for Moses to come down – TOO LONG for the Israelites. So, the Israelites make a golden calf, who will now serve as their god. Their timetable was not being met, so they made another god who would “listen” to them, and operate on their schedule. But, how did they get to that point? Look at verse 20-22 of our passage. (**Read 106:20-22**). Israel had forgotten that God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. They had forgotten the plagues, the Passover, and God's parting of the Red Sea. How could they possibly forget that? How can we forget that God sent his Son who died in our place and rose from the dead giving us life? How do we forget that? But we do. We have forgotten that we worship a God who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think. We have forgotten.

BUT, there is good news. After 38 verses of Israel's forgetfulness and failure, verse 44 and 45 say, “Nevertheless, God looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry. For their sake he remembered their covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.” In spite of all their rebellion, their ingratitude, their idolatry, he heard their cry. What a gracious and loving God. Think about what this passage describes from verse 6-43. Israel rebels against God, because they did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love. In the wilderness, God's people complained about the food being served by God from the sky, because they did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love. Israel made a golden calf to worship since God

was up on a mountain, because they did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love. Israel complained because it was taking too long to get into the Promised Land, because they did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love. Israelite men began having sexual relationships with Moabite women and offered sacrifices to the dead, because they did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love. Israel complained about the condition of the water they were receiving, because they did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love. Israel began to worship with the Canaanites and sacrifice their children to the idols of Canaan, because they did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love... But, God hears their cry and remembers the covenant with his people. God delivers them over and over again.

God's covenant promises are our hope and comfort. He doesn't just sit back and recall, "oh yeah, I made a covenant with my people." He remembers his covenant with Adam to send a redeemer who would crush the head of Satan. He remembers his covenant with Noah that he would never destroy the earth with water again. He remembers his covenant with Abraham that he would bless his family and they would become a great nation and be given a great land. He remembers his covenant with Moses and the great rescue from Egypt that preceded it. He remembers and responds with forgiveness and deliverance.

What if my sins were listed in the Scriptures? What if my failures, like Molly Huddle's were broadcast on YouTube for all the world to view? What if we all could read about the times I failed and forgot about God's steadfast love? My Psalm 106 would probably read something like this... And Stan Winder failed to obey his parents as he should, often complaining when his every desire wasn't met, because he did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love. And Stan failed to love others as he should often being relationally lazy and distracted, because he did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love. At times, Stan failed to father his children as he should, often being incommunicative because he did not remember the abundance of God's steadfast love... But, God delivers me over and over again. God hears my cry and remembers his covenant... When you fail, when you forget to remember God's sacrifice and works of abundant love for you, cry out

to God. You might think that God would hold his ears and refuse to hear you. You might think that there is no chance that God would forgive you for something you have done, but God is a loving Father, who looks upon us with compassion. He hears your cry. He offers grace and mercy. God remembers. He remembers and he rescues.

We Remember

Eugene Merrill writes that “Experts in intelligence declare that every impression experienced by an individual, verbal, or otherwise, is stored away in the cognitive memory bank, waiting there to be retrieved. Such capacity, though not fully understood, has been celebrated and pressed into the service of the intellectual, cultural, and religious life of all people. Human beings have always had the desire and the ability to bring the past into the present by way of memory and in so doing to perpetuate tradition by re-enactment.” It is for this very reason that every July, people don’t sit around Gettysburg and think about the civil war. They don’t just recall the events and the struggle. They re-enact the battles. Thousands of people flock to Gettysburg to dress up in mid 19th Century clothing, clean their antique weapons, pitch their tents, and in some cases play dead for a few hours in the afternoon. Why? Because re-enactment grabs ahold of the past and brings it into the present. The reality of the civil war becomes a little more real when you are lying on the grass with blood on your chest, cannons going off in the distance, and people are stepping over you with bayonets outstretched. It isn’t war, but it brings the past closer and helps you experience it in the present. Because the way back from failure and forgetfulness is not just recall. Remembering is not just bringing past events into our consciousness, remembering demands response.

This is clearly evident in the use of “remember” in the Scriptures. When the thief on the cross asked Jesus to “remember me when you come into your kingdom,” he isn’t asking Jesus to merely recall him in heaven. “Hmmm. I remember him.” He is asking Jesus to act on his behalf, to bring him into the family of God. When Paul tells us to “remember the poor,” I don’t think I am going out on too much of a limb when I say this involves more than thinking about people and feeling bad for them.

Well, thankfully, God is well aware of our tendency to be forgetful. So, he gives his people reminders, which are more than just post-it notes on a mirror (although those are good too). He gave us celebrations to recall and respond to his generous and gracious acts throughout history... The pivotal act in the life of Israel was the exodus. It was the ultimate act of deliverance and rescue bringing God's people out of slavery into freedom. And immediately after God delivers his people from slavery in Egypt, he calls them to remember. Exodus 13:3 says, "Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place." God establishes the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread to serve as a celebration of the exodus. After giving instructions on the food for the feast, God says, "you shall tell your son on that day, 'it is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year." This statute was much more than a law or commandment. It was God recognizing Israel's tendency to forget. And in his grace and wisdom, God gave his people a feast, a celebration, so they would remember the day God brought them out of Egypt.

We see this again in the book of Joshua. Over and over again, Joshua is commanded to set up these stone memorials in order to help the people of Israel remember the great works that God has done on their behalf. After God parts the Jordan River (Red Sea style), allowing Israel to enter the Promised Land, Joshua sets up a memorial of twelve stones. Why? Joshua says, "that this may be a sign among you, When your children ask in time to come, 'What do these stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel, a memorial forever."

But, it's possible that this link between recall and response is no clearer than in the 4th commandment. "Remember the Sabbath day... for

in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.” To remember the Sabbath is to re-enact the rest of God. We cease our work and focus our thoughts and actions on the Creator. For Israel, this Sabbath-keeping or Sabbath-remembering became the focal point of their worship, and largely distinguished them from all other nations. Remember the Sabbath day.

If you are tracking with me this morning, you may know where this is going. (Or if I am miserably failing, you may be considering a nap by now). When God sent his Son to earth, this pattern of remembrance continued. Just as rocks, festivals, feasts, and Sabbath days were given to help the people of Israel experience and remember God’s gracious acts for his people, in the New Testament, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper as a continual reminder of the new exodus, the new deliverance, a deliverance from slavery to sin and death. As Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper with his disciples in the upper room, he said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me... And this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”... Eating and drinking is remembering. **DO THIS** in remembrance of me. Our action of eating and drinking is recalling the work of Christ on the cross, and responding with repentance, gratitude, and celebration. Eating and drinking is remembering. And as the Apostle Paul writes, when we eat/drink and remember, we are proclaiming the gospel, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” Remembrance is recalling and responding.

And it is during the Lord’s Supper, during our remembrance that we are once again brought to repentance and confession. For just as the psalmist does in our passage this morning, when we remember, our thoughts return to our forgetfulness and our failures. Our complacency and busyness pull us away from remembering our God, and we fail to obey his word and commands. Our families begin to drift apart, conflicts arise between friends, and we forget about the reconciliation that was accomplished by Christ on our behalf. So, we come to the table of our Lord confessing our sin, confessing our forgetfulness. We confess that we, like Israel, have been ungrateful for the ways God has sustained us

and provided for us. We confess that we, like Israel, have been impatient, insisting that now is always the right time. We confess that we, like Israel have exchanged the glory of God for the images of ourselves.

Conclusion

Remembering brings us to repentance, and once we have gazed upon our sin, we are reminded of the overwhelming grace of our Savior, which brings us to worship. As Tremper Longman writes, “nowhere in the Bible is history reported only to impart historical information, but this is especially true in the Psalms. Rather, God’s acts are recounted so that we might praise him.” In the final two verses of our Psalm this morning, the writer cries out, “Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise... Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, “Amen!” Praise the Lord!” It is why we join together singing, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above the heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”

As we sing, as we read Scripture, as we pray, as we eat the Lord’s Supper, we know that God has not forgotten us. We worship a God whose steadfast love endures forever! We worship a God who saves his people with wondrous works. We worship a God who sent his Son to give us life when death was inevitable and we had no hope. God sees our failures and our forgetfulness, he hears our cries and our repentance and he rescues us from sin and death. He reaches into the deep waters of hopelessness, bringing comfort and peace... God remembers. Will you remember?