

Part 10: Never Forget

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We all know the pain of difficult memories but we also know the pain of what we don't remember—the pain of what we forget.

It's hard to find peace when you're worried about something being forgotten. Tomorrow, I'll drive to the airport to fly out and on the way there I'll be worried about what I forgot. You might have a big project due tomorrow afternoon and you're worried that your partner might forget to submit it on time. Kids, maybe your parents are running a little late to pick you up from school, and you wonder if they forgot you. Or, maybe you're aging, and you've seen the pain of memory loss—and you're anxiously trying to store up the memories you hope to never forget.

Hope often hangs on good memory doesn't it? If I remember the right stuff my trip will go smoothly. If you remember what you studied, you'll get that degree and the life you wanted. If your parents remember you, it reinforces the reality of their care for you. Hope that I remembered what I needed to get through airport security. Hope that you can graduate with honors. The way to hope is often paved with a rest for those who never forget.

Never forget. That's the title of our sermon this morning. And it's a timely sermon because we are forgetful people. This isn't new. Our study of the book of Genesis confirms this. Last week we saw the danger of humanity forgetting its God—and therefore forgetting the depth of the problems they faced.

Last week we saw how God was going to deal with that sin by sending a flood. God remembered the problem, and God remembered what the world was supposed to be like. It ended with one man, Noah, and his family safely placed on an ark while outside the flood waters raged on.

Notice the language Moses used here: **Genesis 7:21-24**, "And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days."

The problem isn't forgotten anymore. God will judge sin. But as the waters raged, and the storm continued, we wonder if hope has been forgotten too. Will Noah remember his hope? Will he get off the ark safely? Is there any hope for us?

Well, your passage today is good news for those who are forgetful. Because while we might at times forget the problem, and while we might at times forget where our hope is—there is a God who never forgets. Our passage opens today with those important words: "But God remembered."

That's our main point this morning: **Never forget the God who always remembers.**

Last week we saw the flood waters rise. This week, as the flood waters drain, we are reminded of three things: **A Powerful Memory**, **A Partial Memory**, and **A Promised Memory**.

The flood was God's way of wiping out sinful humanity on a global level. But it wasn't a memory wipe, it didn't erase what we should know—it just reset and reframed what we cannot forget. The flood is a story of the goodness of God we forgot—and how the God who never forgets calls us back to hope.

Let's begin this morning with: **A Powerful Memory**.

The accounts of those who survived Hurricane Katrina often describe the fear of being forgotten. They survived the storm—but trapped in an attic or stranded on a roof—they wondered if anyone would remember they are still out there.

If you've ever felt ache before, look at the good news in **Genesis 8:1**, "But God remembered Noah, and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark."

God never forgets. Song of Songs 8:7 reminds us, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." And while the floods drowned man's wickedness. It couldn't quench God's love for man.

Let's not forget that this comes only after the waters prevailed on the earth for 150 days. The longest recorded swim we have in human history is 29 hours. God's work of judgement was probably done long before 150 days. So, what happened? Did God forget about Noah like a parent who sends their kid to their room and forgets about it?

No! From a human perspective "remembering" is often tied to our own forgetfulness—but when we are talking about the God of the Bible his "remembering" is tied to his unchanging faithfulness. While Noah was righteous in his own generation—neither Noah or his family was sinless. Being better than someone else might get you picked first in sports, but it won't get you picked for salvation.

What kept Noah safe in that ark, what will keep you safe inside of God's salvation, is not your moral perfection—but God's faithfulness to keep his word. Noah's hope was in God remembering his promise to deliver him through the waters. A promise we saw last week, **Genesis 6:18-19**, "But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you."

Noah wasn't saved, and you won't be saved, because God remembered your record of performance—saving righteousness is when we put our hope in God remembering his record of promise. God makes promise to those who hope in him—and he will not forget them.

And God's memory does something. If I remember my ID on the way to the airport tomorrow—I've done nothing. But God's memory is tied to God's power. It always does something. If you look at the opening verses of **Genesis 8:1-3**, you see that as quickly as God calls to mind his covenant to Noah—the waters God initially sent began to retreat and drain from the earth.

We aren't sure if Noah doubted God's power at this point—but notice how nature doesn't forget who God is. When God tells nature what to do—it does it. Don't forget what nature doesn't: God's power means he's always in control.

In seasons of your own troubles, you might look around and wonder if God forgot or if he's in control of, what seems to you to be, something that is wildly out of hand. But nothing is outside of God's hand. He is powerful, he is sovereign, and he doesn't forget what he's set out to do.

Take hope from Noah's situation here. The rain from Katrina lasted a night—and the city was dry within 43 days. But Noah had to endure 40 days for rain, and if you look back at **Genesis 8:3**, it was 150 days before God started to drain the flood waters.

That's already a lot of waiting. But there's even more waiting Noah would have to do. Even after God decided in his heart to drain the flood, it was another two and a half months before Noah would realize it as he saw the tips of the mountains again. If you follow verses 6-14 it describes what all went on as Noah waited a couple more months before all the water was gone.

Then we finally read: **Genesis 8:13**, "In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry."

After a three-hour road trip, when I open the sliding doors of my van—my children spill out as if they've never been on land before. But here, Noah removed the covering of the ark—saw the ground was dry—yet no one left the ark!

Why? Because Noah's hope was no longer in what seemed good and safe to him. The vision correction from the week before worked. The ground looked safe and dry—but Noah and his family were waiting on the word of God. He knew what was good, and they knew he didn't forget them.

In Genesis 8:4 Moses said, "the ark came to rest." Even before the waters drained, even before Noah saw the mountains, even before the door was opened—Noah saw the rest. His rest was in the God who brings us to rest even when troubles are slow to recede. Noah's rest was in the powerful memory of a God who doesn't forget.

But 57 days after the door was opened, over a year after they first entered the ark—God said this: **Genesis 8:15-22**, Then God said to Noah, "Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

God's word leads us back to the hope we often forget. If you seem to be in a season of waiting—look at what Noah saw and remember. Last week all these animals came onto the ark two by two. Why? Because God wanted to use those animals to repopulate the world. That ark was the seed from which God was going to restore Eden.

But did you see what Noah did as soon as he got out? He started killing off those animals! And yet, God was pleased. How? Didn't Noah just mess everything up? No. Because look, and don't forget. Look back at the language of **Genesis 8:19**. The animals that went in two by two—didn't come out two by two. They came out as families.

In death's rain outside the ark—God's promise bore new life inside of it. If all Noah did was look outside—he'd never have eyes to see God's faithfulness inside. The same is true for us. If our hope is in Jesus—we must learn to stop judging Jesus' faithfulness to his based off the external things in our world changing for the better. Jesus has come to change the world—and he will do it—but that day is not yet. But for those who are in him—we might look inside our own hearts and be encouraged by the life he's producing inside our own hearts.

Biblical faith isn't blind faith. But it's faith that learns where to look to see God's faithfulness. Everyone wants a better world—but Jesus right now helps give us better hearts, affections and habits. There he births the seeds of life which will keep us in a world that looks like Eden—but is still far from it.

This is our second point this morning: **A Partial Memory**.

God was pleased, worship was restored, life was flourishing again. And God covenanted in his heart to not destroy the world again with a flood. But don't skip over the fact that God still had to make that covenant. Why? Because God knew that while sin was temporarily washed away—sin was still there. It was in Noah's heart, and it would rear its ugly head again.

As good as this new world looked—there was still a greater work left to do. And while God saw this in his own heart—he wanted to make sure Noah and his family knew this too. Because if we aren't careful—we can look out into this big and beautiful world and see the presence of what is beautiful and the absence of the flood waters and think: "This is it, we've reached perfection. My heart can be satisfied, fixed and filled with all that is here."

And God wants to affirm the goodness of his created world, but God also wants to warn us that this world is still just a partial memory. It gives us glimpses of hope, but it's not our final hope.

This is drawn out in the way God gives Noah and his family the same set of commands he gave Adam and Eve, but with some noticeable differences. There are three partial pictures here.

First, yes, you've got to be fruitful and multiply. But unlike before where dominion was promised, look at what God says: **Genesis 9:2**, "The fear of you and dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered."

What's God saying? He's saying you've still got to do the work I've made you for—but it's not easy. You'll be wrangling animals, not just weeds. The world will not easily fall into place. Don't expect your work to grant you the peace you need. Work is good—but it's not the source of your peace.

Second, we get some really good news, **Genesis 9:3-4**, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." While we might praise the Lord for BBQ--this is given to remind us that we are going

to need more calories to work. Because the ground has been cursed--plants will be difficult to grow, and plants alone might need to be supplemented with a more calorie rich food source. This doesn't mean that humanity couldn't eat meat prior to the flood--but it does remind us that God provides for us the energy we need to meet the tasks that he has given for us. God calls us to do hard things, but he gives us the power to do them. He doesn't forget who we are or what we need.

This leads us to our third distinction. Life is precious, and humanity is still made in the image of God, but we live in a world where God's image and God's ideals will still be violated: **Genesis 9:5-6**, "And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

God cares about life, and especially human life. In a world where humans all too frequently devalue and diminish the life of other image bearers—God says: Don't forget in whose image you're made. I'll demand a reckoning. Christians, of all people, should be the most pro-life in every sphere of humanity because no one is more pro-life than God.

Now why do we need to be reminded of all of this? Because if we aren't careful, we will always be frustrated at what is only a partial memory of paradise. If you look into this world and expect it to be sunshine and roses—it's not going to be. But if you look into this world and think it's all darkness and no hope—you're wrong. As we often sing: "This is my Father's world, I rest me in the thought of rocks and trees and skies and seas—his hand the wonders wrought."

There's always hope in this world. But our hope is never in what is here now—it's still in the future. And that's why we sing: "This is my Father's world: Oh, let me not forget, that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet."

And that God, the ruling God, will not forget us. This is our third point this morning: **A Promised Memory.**

Genesis 9:8-11, "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

God, freely, and without any deserving on Noah's part--didn't just promise to save Noah on the ark--but here covenanted to not destroy all things by flood waters again.

This is where Noah's story becomes our story. God didn't forget Noah. But now we see that God has promised to not forget anyone. God will deal with sin. He can't not. But his dealing with sin will not come by simply wiping out all of humanity.

This isn't because God is remorseful. It's because God is faithful.

Other pagan accounts of the flood are the result of gods who were irritated and vengeful. But the Bible stands alone in that the account of the flood doesn't show God's fickleness, but his faithfulness. It draws us to God's covenant keeping nature as the hope for those who can't keep their own lives together.

Look at what God did next: **Genesis 9:12-17**, And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

God put a sign in the clouds, a rainbow, and that rainbow signified God’s covenant to not send a flood again to destroy all flesh.

Now, it’s not surprising to learn that the rainbow has been co-opted by other worldviews today. Those world views are associated with happiness, and they are meant to remind you that you’re ok. In a way they point to your own self-sufficiency.

But this is not at all what God is pointing too. In fact, God’s not emphasizing the sunshine, he’s drawing our attention to the clouds. Twice he says, “when I bring clouds.” This sign doesn’t come when the sun is at its brightest, it comes in days when it’s partly cloudy with a chance of rain. God’s rainbow reminds us that even when things seem bleak, when it seems darkness and rain are unending, God will not forget his word. He’s not destroying everything by flood. You’ll make it.

But notice how it’s not because of who you are. The rainbow isn’t even meant to remind us that we are safe! The rainbow is meant to remind us of what God remembers: “I will remember my covenant that is between me and you,” “I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature that is on the face of the earth.”

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, when you see a rainbow in the sky—when life is stained with the partial memory of paradise lost and found—God wants you to remember the God who never forgets. Life will be hard, days will be dark, but God doesn’t forget.

What doesn’t he forget? To keep his word. God is promising to make the world new again, but in order to make the world new again—all sin needs to die. No one can get off the ark.

While God will not judge the world with water—he hasn’t forgotten about sin. Take no comfort in the days of your life, do not assume God isn’t real or that he’s forgotten our wickedness. The author of Hebrews puts it this way: **Hebrews 12:25-27**, “See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.” God will judge sin. God won’t forget it.

But God will not forget his desire to recreate a perfect world. Again, the author of Hebrews reminds us, **Hebrews 12:28-29**, “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

This consuming fire God will consume all sin, and yet the possibility of entering his rest still stands. How might we make it through the fire? How can God finally free us from the problem of sin and bring us into his world: You've got to die. Your sin must be buried. It must go under. It must be done away with.

The rainbow reminded Noah, and reminds us today, of God's promise to deal with sin and to restore the hope of perfection. But God now points us to a sign which shows us how he will do that: Jesus Christ, the true Son of Noah would offer himself up as a sacrifice for sinners. On the cross darkness fills the sky—but light overcomes. The sign of the cross is the rainbow of God's always remembering, never forgetting grace. God will deal with sin, he'll judge it. The cross shows that. But if we are on the cross, our hearts are finally freed—life inside the ark.

If we repent and believe in him, we are buried with him. We die. Our sin is dealt with. We live in a partly cloudy world, but our hearts are filled with the sunshine of righteousness. These momentary afflictions, this pain of memories past remind us of the God who never forgets. He will not forget any who run to him today. Storms will come and go. We are not in Eden, and neither are we in glory. But as those seasons of darkness come to pass away—the promise and pleasure of our God will not.

So now when we see a rainbow, never forget, never forget the present hope you have in Jesus. Never forget that amidst darkness, there is hope, hope in a God who saves all who come to him. Never forget the promise of a future that is bright in Christ.

This is what we remind ourselves of when we sing: "On that day when freed from sinning I shall see Thy lovely face. Full arrayed in blood-washed linen, how I'll sing Thy sovereign grace. Come, my Lord, no longer tarry. Bring Thy promises to pass. For I know Thy power will keep me, till I'm home with Thee at last."