

## **Remembering How to Be Saved**

‘Some tourists were visiting the southwestern U.S. and went out to an Indian village in Arizona. Their guide said, “Would you like to meet an Indian with a remarkable memory? He never forgets anything”. “Sure”, they answered. He took them over to an old man seated on the ground draped in his blanket and said, “There he is”. The guide said, “How!” and the old Indian looked up and answered, “How!” “Ask him any question you want to”, said the guide. The tourist thought for a moment and asked, “What did you have for breakfast on the third Thursday of July, 1983?” The old Indian looked up and without hesitation answered, “Eggs”. The tourist was amazed. He couldn’t get over it. When they arrived back home he told his friends of the trip and the Indian with the amazing memory. One of the men answered, “That doesn’t sound so great. He probably had eggs for breakfast every day”. “I didn’t think of that”, said the man. “You’re probably right”. Ten years later the same tourist was back visiting the reservation. The guide said, “Do you want to see an Indian with a remarkable memory? He never forgets anything”. “Oh yeah”, said the skeptical tourist, as he thought of the eggs. “I don’t believe it. Let me see him”. The guide took him over and the tourist walked up to him and said, “How!” The old Indian looked up,

thought for a moment and then answered, “Scrambled”.’

That is an amazing memory! But on the other hand, maybe what we should be more amazed at is how bad are our memories! Even excluding people who have medically-caused memory problems, just ordinary people of all ages are always forgetting things. I remember how on all the many taxis, planes, trains, subways, ships, and busses in Japan, when approaching the next stop, a prerecorded, or sometimes live, message will come over the PA system, “Wasuremono ga nai yō, onegai itashimasu!”, meaning, “Please be careful not to forget any of your belongings!” Despite this, statistics show that of the nearly 130 million umbrellas that are sold every year in Japan, about half of them are forgotten and left on various forms of public transportation or at places of business. Truly our memories are anything but steel traps!

Which is why the Bible is often so very repetitious. So many of the same teachings appear over and over and over again. It’s as if God knew ahead of time that we have a pronounced tendency to forget things. And sometimes we forget the most important things. Even if we know them by heart in our minds, we can still forget them in practice. For instance, we read in the Old Testament lesson how the people of God are to present their offerings of the first fruits of the harvest every year. The first fruits of grain, or vegetables or, well, fruits, are marked when they first appear in the fields and orchards, and then when they’re ripe and at they’re best, they’re harvested and offered to God in a show of worship

and thanksgiving for His blessing which caused the land to produce food for His people. But the offering is accompanied by a recitation of the origin of the people by the one bringing the first fruits. as recorded in Deuteronomy 26:5-10, saying: "My ancestor Jacob was a wandering Aramean who went to live as a foreigner in Egypt. His family arrived few in number, but in Egypt they became a large and mighty nation. When the Egyptians oppressed and humiliated us by making us their slaves, we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors. He heard our cries and saw our hardship, toil, and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and powerful arm, with overwhelming terror, and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey! And now, O Lord, I have brought You the first portion of the harvest You have given me from the ground".

The place God brought them to is the Holy Land, the land of Israel, today, including all of the so-called West Bank and beyond. Isn't it interesting that this land, after the Jews were expelled from it when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in the year 70, was a barren land, a wilderness wasteland, unappealing to anyone who might want to try and eke out an existence on it. And so it remained for the next nearly 2,000 years, when pioneering Jewish settlers began to return to their homeland in the late 1800s. And what had been desert wastes, with the presence of the rightful inhabitants upon it once again, the land began to bloom again and

produce its fruit. Such is the promised blessing of God. He hasn't forgotten! His memory is a steel trap!

For all their faults, God has never forgotten His Chosen People, and indeed, in prophecies in the Scriptures from hundreds and thousands of years ago, He has brought them back to their land from the four corners of the earth to which they had fled in exile over the many centuries. Indeed, even the current war in Ukraine is resulting in many more Jews deciding that now is the time to go back home! Speaking of Ukraine, what we never hear on regular newscasts is the fact that the current war is at root a spiritual battle. When the old Soviet Union fell, and many territories and lands gradually broke away, regaining their independence as sovereign countries, religious freedom was also restored. Atheism was no longer enforced, and the spiritual hunger for truth, for the things of God, was immense. Missionaries, largely from the West, poured into these new nations, and into Russia itself, knowing that God had opened a door for the Gospel to be preached far and wide. But many knew the door would not stay open forever. And what we see happening right now shows just how that door is being slammed shut again by the devil as God removes His foot keeping it open.

During these 30 years, the Gospel has flourished in Ukraine, and to a lesser extent in Russia itself. Ukraine itself began sending missionaries to the world, as even more came to work within its borders. The Christians of Ukraine have been praying fervent-

ly before this conflict began, and more so as it now ravages the land. And God has been supernaturally intervening! There are numerous reports of Russian missiles just vanishing mid flight, or bombs dropping but not exploding, lying there inert. God is honoring His promises in Psalm 91 and protecting so many of His people there. Many secular reporters, commentators and military analysts are saying that it's only a matter of time before all of Ukraine falls. Whether it falls or not is according to God's will, and the prayers of His people. Don't be surprised if, against all odds, it emerges from this conflict still standing!

We are taught through Paul in Romans 10:9 that "If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved". What could be simpler? Amazing! But the unbelieving Jews, especially the devout Pharisees that Paul had been one of and was so familiar with, were trying so hard to obey every last point of the Law given through Moses, they couldn't see the obvious, simple way to be saved. For they were working so hard to, really, save themselves. While they knew it was truly next to impossible to fulfill all the Law by themselves, still they worked and worked on it, as a type of works-righteousness. But we can't fault them too much. For their impulse to strive by their human will to become acceptable to God is something all humans share. We all think we have to do something to be saved. All false religions teach that. Do this, recite that, believe this, and then do that, and you'll be saved. In a way,

it essentially puts the way to be saved in our own hands. As if it could ever that way. In case you ever wondered, it can not!

As we're taught in Romans 10:10: "For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved". This is all God's grace, made possible by Christ Jesus' self-sacrifice on the cross. Though the devil took the opportunity to try to steer the Lord onto a supposedly great shortcut to His destiny, our Lord, even in His weakened condition after 40 days of fasting, stood firm on the Word of God, and thereby was strengthened by Holy Spirit to both repel the devil and then to go forth to bring healing and deliverance to thousands throughout Israel, freeing all those "hostages" the devil had captured, but was now losing them, because the Kingdom of Heaven in Lord Jesus had come near.

We're in the season of Lent. Lent concludes with what? Resurrection Day! But Christ Jesus went through a whole lot before that joyous day came. Unimaginable to us His anguish and agony. But for us, Lent is the time built in to our calendars for focussed discipline on our parts to draw closer to God in Christ. It's not work. It's will. Will we? For if we remember "correctly", if we believe, then we're already saved! That part's done with. The new life has already begun for us. We just need to spend these days of Lent growing up a good deal in 2022. For the more we grow *in* the Lord, the more we live filled with joy, defeating the devil when he tempts us with God's word, as did our Lord Jesus!

