

Why We Remember

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Nehemiah 13:29-31
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Today is the day, at least as far as a worship service is concerned, where we remember, Memorial Day, where we remember the men and the women who were willing to pay the ultimate price, who were willing to give of their own lives so that we could be in a free society. You know, today particularly as we walk through what we're calling a global pandemic, it seems like there is a heated discussion in regards to freedom, there is division and divisiveness and even great debates on how much is too much and what is restrictive of, and throughout the course of our country our existence has been somewhat messy, so to speak, but they were willing to go and to give anyway. They were willing to give of their lives so that we could debate and at times we could even be a little bit divisive. They were willing to go and to give their lives so that we could gather to worship, although many of them never dreamed we'd be worshiping like we are today in empty buildings from our couches and our back porches, but even the very fact that you're watching this broadcast is a produce of what they were willing to give.

So today as remember those men and women who paid the ultimate price for our physical freedom, it serves as a natural transition to remember the one who gave his life for our spiritual freedom. In fact, at the end of our message today we will be celebrating what we know as the Lord's Supper, what I call the ultimate memorial celebration, and on this weekend where we remember those who gave physically and today particularly he who gave for our spiritual lives, I want to ask a very important question: why do we remember? Why do we reflect? Why do we look back on those we love and even those in this case oftentimes that we've never met, why do we remember?

This morning hopefully you have a copy of God's word with you. I want to encourage you to turn to two places. We're going to begin in the book of Nehemiah 13 and then toward the end of the service we're going to make our way to 1 Corinthians 11. As you're turning to those two passages in the Scriptures, allow me for those of you who have not been with us, let me catch you up to speed of why we are at Nehemiah 13 today. Not only is it a part of our daily Bible reading plan but today as we celebrate Memorial Day, as we celebrate the ultimate memorial through the body and the blood of Jesus Christ, we find ourselves on the end of the story of the Jewish people's return to their homeland, in fact, for hundreds of years they had been rebellious, that's gonna be important in just a moment; they had ignored God's voice; they had rejected his prophets; they refused to

listen to the Scriptures, and what God said was gonna happen happened, they were taken captive. In fact, in 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians took them away from their homeland, destroyed their city, their walls and even their precious place of worship, their temple. It would be 70 years that they would be there in Babylon and the Babylonians would go away and the Medes and the Persians would rise to power, but just as the prophet Jeremiah spoke, it would be 70 years. The stories of what we know as Nehemiah and Ezra chronicle for us the return of God's people back to their land. After 70 years of captivity, they began to go back, they began to rebuild their lives, their city, the wall, and in particular the temple and the altar in which you and I know as the Holy of Holies. When we get to the book of Nehemiah, it's not only an account of the rebuilding of the physical structure but a repurposing of their spiritual purpose, in fact, one of the things that as we walk through the book of Nehemiah we see in chapters 8 and 9 one of the great revivals not just in the Bible but in all of history as the people of God gathered in the place of God, they read the Scriptures for three hours at a time, they confessed their sins for three hours at a time, and then they went into their places of business, they went into their homes and lived out that which the Lord had convicted them from his Scripture at that place of worship. We look at chapters 8 and 9 of Nehemiah, at least personally I long to see that in our lives. I couldn't imagine a worship service in our culture and our context where we spend the better of five or six hours focusing on the things of the Lord and nobody complains, nobody gets upset. As you walk your way through Nehemiah, you get to chapters 10, 11 and 12 and it seems like business as usual. They would gather and then they would go out into their respective communities and they would live out their faith.

Then comes chapter 13 and as we're gonna see in just a moment, chapter 13 happens in all of our lives but in Nehemiah it took place about 10 years after the revival, and 10 years after the revival we discover that the Levites and the priests no longer took their role as a sacred role, the people began to marry those who they were commissioned never to marry, they began to mingle with those they should have never had intimate relationships with, they began to not only ignore but to defy the law of God. They found themselves again in a familiar position to humanity, rebelling against their God just 10 years after the fact that one of the greatest revivals that anybody's ever seen took place. Maybe today you're a lot like the Israelites, maybe it's been 10 years since you've even part of a worship service, maybe it's been 10 years since you've ever focused on the things of God, maybe you say, "Well, it's been about 20 or 25." It doesn't matter if it's been 25 years or 2 ½ weeks, what we see in Nehemiah 13 is a story for all of us of what does it look like to remember God's goodness, what does it look like to remember his mercy, what does it look like to remember his grace.

Let me encourage you to turn to Nehemiah 13. Again we're just gonna read the last three verses. As I mentioned, the people are in rebellion, they're living lives they should not be living, making decisions they have no business deciding and Nehemiah begins to confront them, he begins to explain to them what the word of God says to remind them of who they are and how they're to live their life. When you get to chapter 13, beginning in verse 29, listen to what Nehemiah says,

29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. 30 Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; 31 And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

I think it's interesting in the three last verses of the story of Nehemiah, twice he asked God to remember them: once on behalf of the people at large, and once on behalf of himself. So today I want to look at the story of the Jewish people, I want to look at this call to remembrance, I want to look at what were they remembering, how were they to remember, and then see how can we overlay and apply that to our lives today particularly as we culminate our service in the taking of what we commonly refer to as the Lord's Supper.

The first question we have to ask is: what were they to remember? And the statement that he makes about, "Remember them, O Lord, and remember me," is it just about the recent confrontation? It's not just about recent days where he was calling them back to be the people they were called to be, what he was actually conferring to them is their standing and their state. Now those may be words that are familiar to you but if not allow me to explain the difference between one's standing and one's state particularly when it goes into relationship with God. Their standing is who they were in relationship to God, and their state was the present spiritual condition of that relationship. In other words, when we speak about the standing of these people Nehemiah was speaking to, their relationship to God was firm even though their present, shall we say, spiritual health was somewhat faulty.

Allow me to explain the standing of the people that Nehemiah was referring to. These were the people of God, it was initiated with whom we know as Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the famous 12 tribes. What do we discover about their standing? They had been called by God. These people, even though they had been in rebellion and even though they fell into captivity and even though they had fallen into a 10 year spiritual backsliding, it did not negate their calling by God. In fact, when God called Abram out of the Ur of the Chaldees and he asked him and his wife to go to a land that they knew not of, to go and to start not just a new people as far as a, shall we say, "race" is concerned, but to create a mechanism, a means by which the Messiah, the one who would give his life not just for them but for all of humanity, the fulfillment of the prophecy all the way back in Genesis 3, that from the seed of the woman would come one who would crush the head of the serpent. They were called by God to be the means, the manner, the vehicle by which the Messiah whom we know as Jesus Christ would come to us and for us. Both in Genesis 12 and chapters 15 we see vivid accounts of the Lord coming to Abram, even at one point though childless at the time, asking him to see the stars in the sky to see if there was any way he could believe that his descendants would outnumber them and he said, "Yes, Lord, I believe."

They were called by God to be the people of God to be the means of the Messiah for humanity, but they weren't just called, they were kept. In fact, one of the things that we

see about the Jewish people all throughout the Old Testament is that they have times of great spiritual fervor and then they have times of great rebellion and, shall we say, even apostasy. We see times where they're taken captive, we see times where they bear great prices for their sin, and here's what's important about their standing, that even though they had backslidden, even though there was apostasy, and even though there was all scenarios of rebellion, even that state did not change their standing. They were called by God and they were kept by God.

When you get to 2 Samuel 7, there's this interesting statement that is made in regards to whom we know as King David, the one who the Lord called not only as the youngest of his family but to replace whom we know as Saul who, yes, lived a life of rebellion and he would be the king that even the old city of Jerusalem is still named after today. There in 2 Samuel 7:16 it says that the covenant, the kingdom, the throne that was promised to him – listen to this – is an everlasting one. That means without end. In fact, it's a word that should be at least very personal to those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ because when you get to John 3:16 it says, "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." The same concept that our standing with God, we are called by God, we are kept by God, and these people even in Nehemiah 13, they were marrying people they had no business marrying, the priests were defiling the temple, they were living in sin, they were working on the Sabbath, and yet what we discover that when you look back and you remember how did God work in their lives, he called them to be unto himself and he kept them even in the midst of the rebellion.

You see, that's the standing but what about their state? Well, by the time you get to Nehemiah 13, they've made a mess of things spiritually. If I could use our language today, the church is closed, the pastors are carnal and nobody cares anything about the things of God, and he calls them to remember their standing.

Now when we talk about their state, they were rebellious and this was unfortunately a pattern not just of the Israelites but a pattern of all of humanity throughout time, and his call, his remembrance as far as their state is concerned is for them to return to their God. We see this all throughout the Old Testament. When the people of God would fall into apostasy or be taken captive, there would be a point much like we saw with Nehemiah with Cyrus where they would desire to return to their God and when they would return, they would repent just like we saw in Nehemiah 8 and 9, where they didn't just confess their sins, they confessed even the sins of their fathers and their forefathers and those that led them into Babylon to begin with. So their rebellion led to a return, a repentance, and then there is a remembrance. What does he cry out for? He says, "God, remember them. God, remember me." There is this cry to remember their standing in spite of their state.

Now that's what they were to remember, the next question is how, how did the people of God throughout time remember the promises of God and the provision of God? In just a moment I'll allude to the book of Nehemiah in specific, but there are certain objects that the people of God utilizes throughout time to remember the things of God and these objects are rocks, to be honest with you. In fact, if you go to the Middle East today, if you

visit Syria or Jordan or other countries of the like, it's actually a crime to remove a rock. If you go into Turkey, it's punishable by extreme measures. They don't want any of their land taken from them but if you ever go to Israel, the tour guides will tell you, "Take all the rocks you want." It's not just a land as the Old Testament calls it flowing with milk and honey, it is a land that is flowing with rocks. I mean, they are everywhere.

And so you see the people of God throughout the Old Testament utilize what you and I call a rock as a means of remembering God's promise and provision. In fact, in the book of Genesis 28, we have Jacob, remember we have Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes who one night lays his head upon a rock and there he doesn't just have a vision, he has an experience where he and the angel of the Lord, that famous ladder that reaches from earth to heaven and there's this wrestling match and he refuses to let go until he is blessed even though he will walk away with a limp. The next morning when the event has ended, he takes that rock that he had laid his head upon, he anointed it with oil and he called the place Bethel, the house or the place of God, to be the very place as we see throughout the Old Testament where the Israelites would gather together to worship the one true God.

When you get to the book of Joshua 4, probably a more familiar story as the Israelites having come out of captivity in Egypt for 400 years, the wilderness for 40 years, they make their way across the Jordan River and the Lord parts the waters and there the men of God, the leaders of the tribes are told to go and put a rock, one for each of the tribes, in the middle of the Jordan River. Genesis 28 we have one rock to be declared the house or the place of God, here in Joshua 4 we have one for all of the famous 12 tribes, by the time you get to the book of 1 Samuel, that great old hymn, "Here I raise mine Ebenezer," this rock that was placed by the people of God as a remembrance not just of the power but the provision of God in their lives.

Why did they do this? What was the purpose of all these rocks? What was the objective? Why would they anoint a rock with oil? Why would they put 12 rocks in the middle of the stream? Why would they do such a thing? Because the objective or the purpose of these items were for them to remember that at times where their state did not match their standing, they could go to the Jordan River and see how God provided in days past, they could go to Bethel and they could see the rock of Jacob, they could see the Ebenezer stone, their God of faithfulness. In fact, in the book of Judges 2 it says that all of these memorials, all of these items, these rocks were designed for future generations to return to to learn the lessons thereof and to be convicted of their own, shall we say, state in light of their standing. You see, they had been called, they had been kept, but they had fallen into rebellion and it was these stones that were designed to cause them to return and to repent to their God and remember his favor even in the times of rebellion.

You know, in the book of Judges 2:10 it says there grew a generation that had not seen the works of God as their parents and their grandparents and they fell into apostasy. When you read Judges 2 you get the idea that they quit returning to the rocks, they quit making the pilgrimage, they quit looking back. You see, that's an important transition for us today as we celebrate what we know as the Lord's Supper. The Israelites typically

would go back and look at those rocks in times of distress or even on an annual pilgrimage and today as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper we discover as we so often do that the stories of the Old Testament are not just history of thousands of years ago, they're actually our story and oftentimes even a little more picturesque. In fact, in just a moment as we make our way to 1 Corinthians 11, we're gonna look at the Lord's Supper, the objective, shall we say, of our remembrance today, but let's take the story of the Israelites and let's apply it to ourselves. Why should we remember today? Why should we take of the Lord's Supper today? Well, we've got to address the what and we've got to address the difference between our standing and our state.

What is our standing today? Well, just like the Israelites in Genesis 12 and 15, the Bible says that as believers in Jesus Christ we are called of God. That's right. In John 1 it says those who believe on Jesus Christ are called the sons of God, the daughters of God, the children of God. What's interesting is the verses preceding that talk about that even those of his own tribe, even those of his own nation rejected his message, rejected his teachings, rejected even his miracles but to those of us who believe, we're called the sons of God.

You know, when we speak about the calling of God as far as our standing with him, it's real simple, the Bible states for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. In fact, in Romans 10:13 it says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So when we talk about our standing as believers, it's not because we have membership in a specific church, it's not because we do a certain set of things that are proper and we reject those that are improper, it's because we've realized we've got a sin problem that only Jesus Christ can fix and we call on him and we believe that the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood is the only means of our forgiveness. So when we talk about remembering today through what we know as the Lord's Supper, the what of our remembrance, our standing, our relationship with him is because of what he did on our behalf that we could not accomplish ourselves.

We are called as well. We are called the children of God, in fact, you get to Romans 8 and it says that we are his adopted children, that we have been grafted in, those of us who were wild by nature, rebellious by nature, now have the opportunity to be called the children of God, the sons of God, the daughters of God, but we're not just called, we're kept. In fact, many of you are aware that typically on a Wednesday evening I address questions that people bring to me in a variety of forms and throughout years and even decades of doing this, do you know what the number 1 question I've been asked by believers in Jesus Christ? Can they lose their salvation. It's one of the most asked questions in, shall I say, the tenure of my ministry, and yet in the same Gospel of John that says we've been called the sons of God when we believe on Jesus Christ, later in chapter 10, verse 28, it says there is nothing that can void that relationship, that we are in his hand and nobody or nothing can pluck us out.

You know, the best illustration is probably present in each and every one of our lives. You don't have to have a family of your own, so to speak, but whatever family that you

call family, we understand the dynamics there. Let me use my own home for an example. As you're aware of, I have three teenage boys in my home, and what is their standing with me? They're my children. There is nothing that can happen to change that fact. They can get upset with me. They can change their name. They can change their location. They can never speak to me again. They can even have an official court document altered to show that they never were a part of our family but here's what they can't change: the very fact that my blood and my wife's blood is flowing through their veins.

That's the illustration we have in Scripture about our standing with God, that we're his children, we've been adopted, we've been brought into his family, we are his sons, we are his daughters, and so when we talk about the what we remember, our standing is that by faith in Jesus Christ we are his children. But here's the state. Sometimes as often the Israelites did, we find ourselves in a place of rebellion, do we not? I think one of the best illustrations is whom we know as the prodigal son. Here he was the descendant of one who was very wealthy and a prized home to be a part of, and he decided to go and live a life of frivolity. He goes out and finds himself eventually broke of his finances and of his relationships, wallowing in the literal mud of life. What does he do? In his rebellion he decides to return to his father. It's a beautiful picture of what it looks like to return home to the Lord as a child of God. He repents. He confesses that he is the one that is in error.

You know, the book of 1 John 1:9 says if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us of all unrighteousness, and that passage of Scripture that we see in 1 John, in fact, the very last verse in 1 John says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." The idea that we have is those children of the Lord who find themselves in a state that doesn't match their standing. You see, today when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, there's nothing that we're about to do that's gonna change our standing with God, it's about our state with God. Maybe for you it's been 10 years, maybe it's been 10 hours, but maybe you find yourself at a place today where the fervor isn't what it used to be, the passion isn't what it used to be, your heart's desire for the things of God and the person of God is not what it used to be. Well, that's why we remember, that's why we celebrate the Lord's Supper because it allows us to reflect not just necessarily on our rebellion but we remember his provision, his grace, his mercy and his love.

Let me encourage you if you have your Bibles open to turn to the book of 1 Corinthians 11 and I think it's perfectly fitting that we have one of the most definitive passages in regards to the Lord's Supper in the book of 1 Corinthians. Why? Because these believers were carnal, they were rebellious, they were consistently strained from who they should be and what they should be about and yet here in 1 Corinthians 11:23 it says,

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,
That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:
24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is
my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After
the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This
cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in
remembrance of me.

So today when we talk about the how, how do we remember, we're not commissioned to go put rocks in the middle of rivers, we're commissioned to take what we know as the Lord's Supper, this bread and this juice.

Allow me to deal with the objects for just a moment. You know, we recognize that scripturally, biblically they are merely what we call elements. They're items to help us remember, much like the rocks. There was nothing about those rocks in the Jordan River that "saved" the Israelites into the Promised Land, they were an item of remembrance, they were utilized as an object to reflect upon what God had done as much the elements that we will partake of in just a moment.

But why the juice and why the bread? Why couldn't it be some other random item? Believe it or not these are very strategic objects. The first is the juice and I know a lot of people have teased, particularly Baptists throughout the years, that we use grape juice because somehow, somehow we're afraid of wine or whatever it may be, you know this is actually biblically purposeful. The book of Deuteronomy as the Israelites are returning into the Promised Land, as they're going to celebrate not only what we know as the Passover but the goodness and the mercy and the love of God on a regular basis, the grape, in fact the juice of the grape – listen to this – is called the blood of the grape. I don't find it coincidental at all that in John 2 at the very first public miracle of Jesus Christ, what did he do? He turned water into wine. Now for the sake of discussion, remember that the master of the ceremonies made comment that he actually had reserved the best wine for last. It was fresh. It was new. It was sweet to the taste. We see this object of the grape being utilized as a symbol of blood. Why do we typically utilize what we know as grape juice? Because we're remembering the blood that Jesus shed.

Why the little cracker, so to speak? Well, in its ideal form it's made of unleavened bread and all throughout the Bible, not only in Exodus 12 at the Passover as the Israelites prepare to leave Egypt but even when Jesus taught in Matthew 13 about the leaven of the Pharisees, it's always symbolic of sin because leaven, what does it do? It starts very small in our lives and it begins to fester and grow and take over our lives, much like the leaven in a loaf of bread. So we utilize what you and I know as a piece of unleavened bread to picture the sinlessness of the life of Jesus Christ.

So the objects of the Lord's Supper, the juice and the bread, aren't just because of man's tradition, it's actually because the Bible speaks to the specific meaning of their element. What's the objective? Well, back in 1 Corinthians 11:26 it says,

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

So why are we taking the Lord's Supper even in a virtual environment? Because even though we are anticipating and desiring the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, until that time we are to remember the blood that he was willing to shed, the body that he was willing to forsake on our behalf.

This Memorial Day we remember those who gave their lives for our physical freedom, I think it's important that today we remember Jesus Christ's life that he was willing to give for our spiritual freedom. So this morning hopefully you have the elements within reach. I'm gonna lead us in at least my first ever virtual Lord's Supper and I'm gonna begin with the bread, an item a symbol of the sinlessness of the body of Jesus Christ, and wherever you find yourself today hopefully you have these elements or these objects somewhat within reach. As we begin with the bread, I'm gonna ask you to do exactly what is recorded in 1 Corinthians 11 that Jesus Christ did at that famous Last Supper. He said, "Take and eat in remembrance of me." And after he took the bread, today we take the juice, the blood of the grape, a symbol not just of his body but of his blood. You know, the Bible says without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. Remember what we're participating in is not gonna change your standing with God but your state with him. Maybe today as you feel the chalkiness of that bread and in a moment as we're about to taste the sweetness of the juice, maybe today is that day where 10 years or 10 days of rebellion comes to an end as we take the juice in remembrance of him.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, as we partake of these elements, Lord, in a world that at least from our perspective is very virtual but from yours, you see us wherever we are today as if we were in this very room, and God, as we remember your willingness to give, your willingness to give of your body and to shed of your blood, Lord, I pray that today that our state would match our standing. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Maybe today as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, maybe you've got questions, maybe you've got concerns and maybe as Dan mentioned in the video earlier, maybe there's a decision you need to make or maybe just an issue to be prayed with or prayed through, we have somebody right now who's on the phone lines and we'd encourage you to reach out to us. The phone number is 334-364-2761. Please make that phone call. We'd love to have a conversation with you, to pray with you, to pray for you, and maybe today as we talked about the difference between our standing and our state, maybe you've got questions about that, maybe you're struggling with some of those things, we'd love the privilege of having that conversation with you.

As we close our service today, as we remember those who gave of their lives physically for our earthly freedom, as we remember he who gave the totality of his life, Jesus Christ, for our spiritual freedom, we leave on somewhat of a semblance of a remembrance note but I want to do something I rarely ever do at a service such as this and an environment such as this, and I'll explain why in just a moment. We the family here at First Baptist, Opelika, lost one of our dear sisters yesterday, Miss. Carol Murphy went to be with the Lord after a great battle with her health, and I'm gonna announce to you that on Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock at the Jeffcoat Trant Funeral Home there will be a visitation and at 11 o'clock there will be a graveside service. The reason I'm taking this moment to announce that to you is because it's Memorial Day weekend, the newspapers will not be printing the obituary before the service takes place and we wanted you, the people at First

Baptist, Opelika, to be aware of the opportunity to go and to share with the Murphy family in their time of loss.

Again, on this day where we remember individuals, an entirety of a nation but in particular Jesus Christ, as those who gave of themselves for our freedom whether it be physical or more importantly with Jesus spiritually, we hope that you not only have a safe Memorial Day but you remember the price that Jesus Christ paid for your freedom, not just an earthly freedom but a heavenly freedom. Thank you and God bless for being a part of our service.