

**Give Thanks to the Lord of Saving Grace:
We Forget, but He Remembers**

Psalm 106

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Praise the LORD!

*Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!*

*² Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD,
or declare all his praise?*

*³ Blessed are they who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times!*

*⁴ Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people;
help me when you save them,*

*⁵ that I may look upon the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may glory with your inheritance.*

*⁶ Both we and our fathers have sinned;
we have committed iniquity; we have done wickedness.*

*⁷ Our fathers, when they were in Egypt,
did not consider your wondrous works;
they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love,
but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.*

*⁸ Yet he saved them for his name's sake,
that he might make known his mighty power.*

*⁹ He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry,
and he led them through the deep as through a desert.*

*¹⁰ So he saved them from the hand of the foe
and redeemed them from the power of the enemy.*

*¹¹ And the waters covered their adversaries;
not one of them was left.*

*¹² Then they believed his words;
they sang his praise.*

- 13 But they soon forgot his works;
they did not wait for his counsel.*
- 14 But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness,
and put God to the test in the desert;*
- 15 he gave them what they asked,
but sent a wasting disease among them.*
- 16 When men in the camp were jealous of Moses
and Aaron, the holy one of the LORD,*
- 17 the earth opened and swallowed up Dathan,
and covered the company of Abiram.*
- 18 Fire also broke out in their company;
the flame burned up the wicked.*
- 19 They made a calf in Horeb
and worshiped a metal image.*
- 20 They exchanged the glory of God
for the image of an ox that eats grass.*
- 21 They forgot God, their Savior,
who had done great things in Egypt,*
- 22 wondrous works in the land of Ham,
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.*
- 23 Therefore he said he would destroy them—
had not Moses, his chosen one,
stood in the breach before him,
to turn away his wrath from destroying them.*
- 24 Then they despised the pleasant land,
having no faith in his promise.*
- 25 They murmured in their tents,
and did not obey the voice of the LORD.*
- 26 Therefore he raised his hand and swore to them
that he would make them fall in the wilderness,*
- 27 and would make their offspring fall among the nations,
scattering them among the lands.*

- 28 Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor,
and ate sacrifices offered to the dead;
- 29 they provoked the LORD to anger with their deeds,
and a plague broke out among them.
- 30 Then Phinehas stood up and intervened,
and the plague was stayed.
- 31 And that was counted to him as righteousness
from generation to generation forever.
- 32 They angered him at the waters of Meribah,
and it went ill with Moses on their account,
- 33 for they made his spirit bitter,
and he spoke rashly with his lips.
- 34 They did not destroy the peoples,
as the LORD commanded them,
- 35 but they mixed with the nations
and learned to do as they did.
- 36 They served their idols,
which became a snare to them.
- 37 They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to the demons;
- 38 they poured out innocent blood,
the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan,
and the land was polluted with blood.
- 39 Thus they became unclean by their acts,
and played the whore in their deeds.
- 40 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people,
and he abhorred his heritage;
- 41 he gave them into the hand of the nations,
so that those who hated them ruled over them.
- 42 Their enemies oppressed them,
and they were brought into subjection under their power.
- 43 Many times he delivered them,

*but they were rebellious in their purposes
and were brought low through their iniquity.*

*44 Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress,
when he heard their cry.*

*45 For their sake he remembered his covenant,
and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.*

*46 He caused them to be pitied
by all those who held them captive.*

*47 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.*

*48 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, "Amen!"
Praise the LORD!*

Intro: Forgetting and Remembering

Last week, I attended the funeral of Michael Ciavolino, Marco Ciavolino's father. Michael was 94 years old when he passed away, having lived a long, strange, and wonderful life. For those of you who don't know the Ciavolinos, Marco, Michael's son, designed our church logo. Michael himself taught Jeremiah sign language and the harmonica when Jeremiah was in 3rd grade and Mr. Ciavolino was 91 years old.

One of the memories that was shared at the funeral was that Michael Ciavolino never forgot any of his children or grandchildren's birthdays. He would always call them on their birthday and play "Happy Birthday" for them on his clarinet. We appreciate people who remember things like that.

But we are all human, and part of being human is forgetting things from time to time. In Psalm 106, we have a stark contrast drawn for us between the forgetfulness of God's people and God's faithful remembering. Near the beginning, Psalm 106 has a plea to God: "*Remember me, O LORD.*" Then, near the end, it has a wonderful statement of God's mercy toward His people. Just when you think God's people have messed up so much, so often, that surely He will disown them and move on, we read, "*For their sake he remembered his covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.*"

In between this opening plea for remembrance and the closing statement of remembrance, we read of God's people forgetting, failing to remember three times:

*“Our fathers, when they were in Egypt,
did not consider your wondrous works;
they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love” – v. 7*

*“But they soon forgot his works;
they did not wait for his counsel.” – v. 13*

*“They forgot God, their Savior,
who had done great things in Egypt.” – vv. 21*

Much of this psalm is dark and bleak, as it focuses on the failures – the forgetfulness, the faithlessness, the rebellion, the wanton wickedness of God’s people. But the purpose of the psalm is not to focus our hearts and minds of failure and futility. This is a psalm that opens and closes with *“Hallelujah!”* and that calls on us to *“Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever,”* and proclaims, *“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, “Amen!”*

But the goodness and greatness of God, His saving power and His merciful remembering are highlighted and shown to be more glorious against the dark backdrop of the sinfulness of His people.

A. An Honest & Faithful Plea & Confession, vv. 1-6

“Remember me, O Lord”

Psalm 106 opens by calling us to praise the LORD and give thanks to the LORD, for He is good and His steadfast love endures forever. This is the most common reason given for God’s people to give thanks – who He is (He is good) and how He acts toward His people (His steadfast love – *hesed* – covenant faithful goodness and lovingkindness – toward us endures forever). Psalm 106 unpacks, in recounting 1000 years of history, just how true it is indeed that God’s steadfast love toward His people endures forever.

The psalmist asks us a question: *“Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD, or declare all his praise?”* We just had a lengthy psalm in Psalm 105, recounting God’s faithfulness to His people over 500 years of history, from the Abrahamic covenant in 1950 BC to the settling of Canaan, the Promised Land, in 1450 BC. Now, we have a second lengthy historical psalm, which begins with the Exodus from Egypt and continues through the exile from the Promised Land in 586 BC, covering about 1000 years of history. But two long psalms covering 1500 years of history can’t even begin to exhaustively unpack and fully declare the mighty deeds of the Lord and all His praise He is due!

How good is God? What great things has He done for His people? How much praise is due to Him for who He is and what He has done? No one can adequately tell it all, but it is so good for us to do what we can, to recount what we can, to declare what we are able, to give thanks to the fullest extent possible. Several years ago, Beth read Ann Voskamp’s best-seller, *One Thousand Gifts*, which encourages us to regularly, intentionally give thanks to the Lord for His good gifts, which we are constantly receiving every day. That book focuses much attention on the little gifts, the unnoticed, unseen, yet wonderful and beautiful things God gives us and does for us day-by-day. These psalms, 105 & 106, help us focus on the big picture of God’s redemption of His people, especially as we learn to read them through Christ.

Verse 3 is interesting, and it seems to be a little out-of-place in this psalm, “*Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!*” It’s a reminder to us of what we’re supposed to be and do in order to be blessed by God. It’s the word of Law, the statement of God’s standard, which sets us up for seeing how far short we fall of what is expected of us, what is right and reasonable. We should observe justice and do righteousness at all times. This is what God requires, and what we should do. The rest of the psalm will make it clear that we don’t.

Then, we have an honest, faithful plea in verses 4-5:

*“Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people;
help me when you save them,
that I may look upon the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may glory with your inheritance.”*

“*Remember me, O LORD*” – Neil Stewart, in his sermon on Psalm 106, says this plea is like a rope tied around the aorta of the heart of God. When we ask God to remember us, we are asking Him to do the very thing He has promised to do and that He will never fail to do for those who belong to Him, whom He has redeemed to Himself. The psalmist wants to be blessed by God along with God’s people.

But he knows he doesn’t deserve it. He knows what God requires, as clearly stated in verse 3, and so as He asks God to remember him, he must confess openly and humbly:

*“Both we and our fathers have sinned;
we have committed iniquity; we have done wickedness.” -v. 6*

Verse 6 is key to understanding the rest of the psalm and for helping us read it and pray it properly. “*Both we and our fathers have sinned.*” The psalmist is looking back on things that happened as long as 1,000 years ago, things previous generations of God’s people have done. The rest of this psalm will be dominated by the pronoun “they” –

- *“They did not remember . . . but rebelled”*
- *“They soon forgot”*
- *“They made a calf”*
- *“They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox”*
- *“They despised the pleasant land, having no faith in His promise”*

But verse 6 makes it clear that, while the psalmist keeps saying “they,” he really means “we.” He identifies with the sins of God’s people, and we must, too, for we are the same as them. Our hearts are just as broken and wayward. If we distance ourselves too much from the people of God in these verses, we will miss the point of the psalm and miss the blessing and the joy of God’s saving grace so wonderfully displayed here.

The heart of Psalm 106 tells the story of the wonderful saving and keeping of God’s people, despite their deep and stubborn sin.

B. A People Saved by Grace, vv. 6-12

“He saved them by His name’s sake”

The salvation of God’s people is recounted in verses 6-12. The great salvation event in the Old Testament is the Exodus from Egypt, especially passing through the Red Sea on dry land. This is the event which creates the Nation of Israel as the people of God. For us as New Testament believers, we don’t look back on the Exodus and the parting of the Red Sea as much as we look back on the cross and the death of Christ and the parting of the curtain in the Temple. The nation of Israel was identified as the people of the Exodus and the Red Sea crossing, but we are identified as people of the cross, people whose sins are forgiven and who have access to God because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

What we see in Psalm 106 is why and how God saved His people:

*Our fathers, when they were in Egypt,
did not consider your wondrous works;
they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love,
but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.
Yet he saved them for his name's sake,
that he might make known his mighty power.
He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry,
and he led them through the deep as through a desert.
So he saved them from the hand of the foe
and redeemed them from the power of the enemy.
And the waters covered their adversaries;
not one of them was left.*

“He saved them for His name’s sake, that He might make known His mighty power.”

In salvation, God acts for His own glory, even as He acts for the eternal good of His people. In all things, God always works for the glory of His own name. Some people think this is weird and selfish of God, but it’s not, because He is God. If I were to work all things for my own glory and honor, that would be wrong because I’m not God. I’m not most glorious and wonderful and deserving of all praise. God is, so it is right for Him to do things *“for His name’s sake.”* If He were to work to exalt and glorify someone else or something else, that would make Him an idolater, just as we are idolaters when we worship as ultimate something other than God. God can’t exalt non-god things higher than Himself – that would be wrong and impossible and an inherent contradiction.

The wonderful thing about God is that He doesn’t have to tie our salvation to His glory. He doesn’t have to choose to be glorified by saving His people. He chooses to do that because of His love for us. He chooses to tie His glory and our good together in the Gospel. So, He acts *“for His name’s sake”* in a way that saves His people – despite our sin! For that, we should overflow with thanksgiving and Hallelujah to Him forever!

Verse 12 ends this section of Psalm 106 on a very positive note –

*Then they believed his words;
they sang his praise.*

This is recounting the Song of Moses in Exodus 15, which was echoed by Miriam, as she led the people in singing God's praises on the shores of the Red Sea, as Pharaoh's army was drowned in judgment and God's people were safe.

C. A Forgetful and Rebellious People, vv. 13-23

Forgetting God's Works: "They soon forgot"

The high point of verse 12 doesn't last long. Verse 13 tells us, "*they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel.*" In fact, it was three days after the Red Sea crossing and the Song of Moses that God's people began grumbling and complaining. We don't even get out of Exodus 15 before we read "*They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"*" – vv. 22-24

Exodus focuses on the grumbling of the people, but Psalm 106 helps us to see the theological root of their grumbling: They forgot God's works. In three days of desert wandering, they forgot the miracle of the Red Sea – for surely, if they had remembered, they would have known that the God who parted the Red Sea and drowned the most powerful army in the world immediately after bringing them through safely could surely change bitter water to sweet, and would not leave them to die of thirst in the desert after miraculously redeeming them just days earlier.

This kind of forgetting isn't a cognitive forgetting, of course. They weren't suffering from actual, physiological amnesia. Rather, they were suffering from theological amnesia, from a lack of theological remembering. In other words, while they most certainly could have re-told the story of the Red Sea, they had forgotten what it had shown them about God.

This is us. How soon do we forget? God saves. God provides, God is good, again and again, and yet we forget His good works. We panic, we are anxious, we fear, we grumble and we worry because we forget! That's why we need constant reminders:

What then shall we say to these things? ["These things" are the bitter waters we encounter in our lives.] If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? – Romans 8:31-32, ESV

Forgetting God's goodness has all sorts of nasty consequences: God's people crave, complain, grumble, and end up in rank idolatry. Forgetting God's good works, they end up forgetting God Himself:

*They made a calf in Horeb
and worshiped a metal image.
They exchanged the glory of God
for the image of an ox that eats grass.*

*They forgot God, their Savior,
who had done great things in Egypt*

The psalmist is mocking the insanity of their idolatry. As John Calvin says in his commentary:

“For seeing that God had clothed them with his own glory, what madness was it to substitute in place of him not only an ox, but the inanimate form of an ox, as if there were any resemblance between God who creates all kinds of food, and that stupid animal which feeds upon grass?”

The only thing that saved the people at this low point of idolatry and immorality was the intercession of Moses, who is here a model of Christ’s intercession for His people. What saves us from the wrath of God when we are forgetful, and our forgetfulness leads us into insane idolatry? It is the loving intercession of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ!

D. A Faith-less and Grumbling People, vv. 24-43

Doubting God’s Word: “Having no faith in His promise”

Forgetting God’s works and forgetting God Himself then leads them to have no faith God’s word. Forgetting what God had done for them in the past caused them to have no faith in His promises for their future. Again, it is the same for us.

Lacking faith in God’s promises leads to more grumbling and still more rank idolatry in verses 25-29, which leads to the need for another intercessor – this time, it is Phineas who acts swiftly to execute justice and stand in the gap between the people and God’s wrath against their idolatry.

What we might miss is that both of these cases of idolatry – the Golden Calf and Baal-Peor – involved sexual immorality. Very often, we see this pattern in Scripture –

- Step One: Forgetting God and His wonderful works of redemption for His people
- Step Two: Complaining and grumbling against the goodness of God
- Step Three: Doubting or denying the Word of God (in the first case, it was not waiting for God’s counsel, and in the second case it was not believing God’s promise)
- Step Four: Rank insane idolatry – turning to false gods to fulfill our desires
- Step Five: Sexual immorality that flows from the idolatry

So, forgetting leads to doubting which leads to exchanging God for a cheap substitute which leads to sexual immorality or other gross immoral behavior. Moses intervened and Phineas intervened, but the people kept on sinning. We see this pattern again in verses 32-39. Ultimately, the repetition of this pattern would lead them to sacrifice their children for their idols and would lead God to send them into exile. We need to see this pattern for we are subject to the same temptations.

E. The Only Hope for Such People, vv. 44-48

“For their sake, He remembered His covenant”

What is the hope for such people – such forgetful and idolatrous people as we ourselves are tempted to be?

Just when we’re exhausted from hearing this repeated pattern, the pattern is broken by God’s goodness in verse 44:

*Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress,
when he heard their cry.
For their sake he remembered his covenant,
and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.*

Our hope will never be found in ourselves; it is only and always found in the Lord, in His covenant and in the abundance of His steadfast love!

If this is true, then the only thing, the best thing we can do is to cry out to Him –

*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.*

The answer isn’t to try harder to be better; it is to cry out to God for salvation, for He alone can save us, even from ourselves!

Give Thanks and Bless the Lord!

And the good news is that He does save us, even from ourselves, even despite ourselves! What a wonderful God and Savior! And so, Psalm 106 ends with praise –

***Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, “Amen!”
Praise the LORD!***