

## *The Transforming Power of Remembering • 2 Peter 3:1-2*

Human memory is a marvelous gift from God. With it we are able to see, hear and think about the past in ways that influence and impact the present. It is unimaginable to us that we could live without the memories of yesterday or without hope for tomorrow.

Let's join in a collective exercise in remembering:

1. Do you remember the day President Abraham Lincoln was shot?
2. Do you remember the day Pearl Harbor was bombed?
3. Do you remember the day John Kennedy was assassinated?
4. Do you remember the day the Challenger exploded?
5. Do you remember the day the World Trade Center came down?

Memories fade with time. What for us is a vivid memory now may be far less vivid in years to come. Generations change and history is forgotten. The worst of memories can be suppressed. The best of memories fade with time. Nursing homes are filled with residents who can remember the exact words of conversations from fifty years ago but cannot remember what they had for breakfast. An older man wrote in his Christmas letter about how many of his friends had died and bemoaned the fact that he was running out of people to whom he could say, "Do you remember when . . .?"

Our generation has heavily focused on the healing of bad memories. We all have memories that have not healed with time. In fact, some of the memories of yesterday have gotten worse as the years have gone by.

St. Peter was not as concerned about healing bad memories as he was about forgetting good memories. He was an old man by first century standards. I wonder if there were days when he couldn't remember the features of Jesus' face or precisely quote the words Jesus had spoken. Perhaps that scared him. He knew that if he could remember the good he would have the strength to face

the bad. He also knew he soon was going to die an extraordinarily difficult death and he wanted to be filled with good thoughts as he faced eternity.

Peter took an approach that was both therapeutic and supernatural. Therapeutic in that the healing of bad memories is never enough—it is a "sum zero" exercise. Supernatural because good memories are God's tools to transform our minds.

Peter probably wrote many letters to Christians in the first century but only two of them still exist today. Those two made it into the New Testament. What we call "Second Peter" was penned shortly before his death in Rome. He knows he's going to die and he writes with the passion and wisdom of a good and godly old man. He passionately expresses ideas that he wants passed down to future generations, including us. In chapter 2 his anger flares out against false teachers who deceive and damage Christians and churches. In chapter 3 his tone settles down and he writes with the tender words of a loving pastor. Look at 2 Peter 3:1 pretending that you are reading Peter's words for the first time and that they were written just for you: "*Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.*"

Before Peter tells us what to remember he explains why to remember. He says it is "*to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.*" Do you ever think about what you think about? I do. Maybe that's why I'm intrigued by the story of a man in Atlanta

who sat in his office chair one day thinking about all his worries until he became so upset that he passed out.

We might compare this to those frequent mattress ads that suggest we each have a "sleep number" on their adjust-

able bed. These numbers go from soft to hard. The idea is that you will get to sleep faster and sleep better with the right "sleep number".

*...a key to the peace of God is what we choose to think about. That is much more than the power of positive thinking; it is the power of Christian thinking!*

St. Peter didn't sleep on a Select Comfort bed; he never even considered the possibility. But he might have had a "Select Think" with "think numbers" from a low of one to a high of 100 and from a low of unwholesome thoughts to a high of positive and wholesome thoughts that would transform everything about him. Of course, some of us say we have no control over what we think; we just think. But that it simply not true. We do control what we think. We may choose to think bad things or to think good things, to think things that are destructive to us or things that are beneficial to us.

This idea is not unique to Peter. St. Paul taught the same important concept in Philippians 4:8-9 when he said:

*... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned to received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

In other words, think wholesome thoughts and practice good remembering and "*the peace of God will be with you.*" So, a key to the peace of God is what we choose to think about. That is much more than the power of positive thinking; it is the power of Christian thinking!

Peter assumes we want wholesome thinking, worry-free living and the peace of God—plus a good night's sleep. So, Peter tells us how to think right. This is very important, so let's be sure to get it right. The way to transform our present thinking is through right remembering. What we remember about the past changes how we think in the present and what we think about the future. In 2 Peter 3:2 Peter tells us, "*I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.*"

Peter gives a two-part memory list. First on his list is the word spoken, specifically "*the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets.*" Peter has in mind here the many predictions made by Old Testament prophets concerning the life, the death, the resurrection and the eventual second coming of Jesus Christ. Hundreds and thousands of years before Jesus was born these prophets told about

his first coming to live, die and rise again. They also anticipated his second coming back to earth. Peter believed that remembering the prophets' fulfilled predictions bolstered faith in the fulfillment of still unfulfilled predictions.

One of Peter's main points is that the Old Testament is loaded with Jesus. Let me give you an unusual but interesting example. In the movie *The Passion of the Christ* there is a strange scene near the beginning of the movie where Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion and a snake crawls around Jesus' feet. That is not actually recorded in the New Testament biographies of Jesus. Rather, it is a reference to what theologians have called the *Protevangelium*. This is Greek for the "first gospel" mention in the Old Testament in Genesis 3:15 which is a quote from God: ". . . he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

This is a quote from God the Father speaking to the serpent Satan in the Garden of Eden. It is the prediction that Satan will inflict serious pain on Jesus (like a snake bite on the foot) but that Jesus would someday crush the head and power of Satan on the cross. While a snake bite is extremely painful and risky it is not necessarily fatal. By contrast, Jesus will crush the head of Satan through his crucifixion on the cross defeating Satan for eternity.

In the movie, the sandaled foot of Jesus crushes the head of the serpent. This first mention of the gospel in the Old Testament was fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Of course, this is just one of the many biblical prophecies and promises. Most of the rest are less strange and easier to understand. Let me give you a few of the more familiar ones:

Psalm 23:

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my*

*head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

I have lost track of how many times I have read those words by a hospital bedside or next to a casket at a burial place in a cemetery. In these situations people are actually dealing with the valley of the shadow of death. When these words are read it recalls the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets. It is transforming to hear, “*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*” Remembering that has enormous influence and impact.

Hebrews 13:5 is God’s promise to Christians: “*Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.*” On your loneliest days when you think that everybody has turned against you, when you are totally desperate, when you think there is no way out . . . to recall these words of God written by a New Testament prophet is transforming.

1 Corinthians 10:13: “*God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*”

These words have been enormously beneficial to those who feel they just can’t take anymore, who are absolutely crushed with the circumstances of life. Then they hear the promise of God that he will help us stand up under whatever we face and he will never allow it to get so bad that it will exceed his ability to make us stand strong in it.

And the list goes on. I once read through the entire Bible in a year and underlined in red hundreds of promises just like these. It was powerful. It was transforming. It stimulated wholesome thinking every time I paged through that Bible and reread “*the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets.*”

***If we remember what God has done in the past, that will change the way we think and behave in the present and the future.***

There is an even broader application of Peter’s teaching in 2 Peter 3:1-2. We should not just remember the words of the prophets. God wants us to remember every experience we have had with God. We should remember the words God has spoken to us personally, the miracles he has done in our lives, the blessings he has given to us and the ways he has seen us through past difficulties. If we remember what God has done in the past, that will change the way we think and behave in the present and the future.

That reminds me of another “*word spoken in the past by a holy prophet*”—Jeremiah. It’s in the Old Testament book of Lamentations, a book of laments. It’s called Lamentations because the capitol city of Jerusalem had been destroyed and the people were heartbroken. Here’s what Jeremiah wrote in Lamentations 3:22-25:

*Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

*I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”*

*The Lord is good to those whose hope in him, to the one who seeks him.*

Second on Peter’s two-part memory list is to remember the command given. He specifically remembers the expectations of Jesus when he writes in 2 Peter 3:2, “*I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.*”

What command of Jesus is Peter referring to? He says that the source of our information is the apostles. That included Peter himself. He’s talking about the words of Jesus recorded in the New Testament; but Jesus gave lots of commands in the New Testament. Jesus commanded us to repent. He commanded us to believe. He commanded us to trust. He commanded us to be baptized. Jesus commanded us to pray, to give, to go and teach his truth to others. Which one is it that Peter has in mind here?

In Matthew 22:36-40 we read about a religious lawyer who once asked Jesus:

*“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*

*Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

That’s good enough for me, but I think Peter had something far broader in mind. He wasn’t narrowing it down to a single command of Jesus. He was speaking of all the commands of Jesus combined. All rolled up into one it would be to live Christianly. Live like Jesus. Think as Jesus would think. Behave as Jesus would behave.

Some people think that is too hard, but the truth is that it is actually the easier way. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30:

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Now, let’s go back to 2 Peter 3:1-2:

*Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets. And the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.*

In order to live right, think right. In order to think right, remember the words of God and the commands of Jesus. Don’t forget to remember. Remember what God has done in your life. Remember what God has said. Remember the kind of life Jesus has called you to.

There is an old American tradition of tying a string around your finger so that you won’t forget something really important. I invite you to tie a string—call it your St. Peter reminder string—around your finger. When thinking sinful thoughts, look at the string. When consumed with worry, look at the string. When uncertain about the future, look at the string. When you see the string, remember God’s faithfulness to you in the past. When you look at the string, remember the promises God has given to you. When you look at the string, remember the commands and expectations of Jesus on how you are supposed to live. Remember. Remember. Remember.

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