

*Does God Forget?*

Does God ever forget anything? I'll repeat the question: Does God ever forget anything? It's understandable that when you're several trillion eons old your memory might not be what it used to be. And with billions of people living on earth all making all sorts of prayer requests, and with an infinite universe to worry about, it's just likely that you might happen to stumble over somebody's name or misplace an asteroid every now and then.

I heard a cute story about a man who stopped attending his synagogue after his one-hundredth birthday. The rabbi stopped by his home to inquire as to why the man was suddenly absent from services after being there every week all his life. The man replied, "Rabbi, all of my friends have passed on. Obviously, God has forgotten me – and I don't want to remind him I'm here!" Now hold that question, "Does God ever forget anything, on the back burner of your mind for a moment, while we take a look at the first lesson today from the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was not a "happy-go-lucky" kind of guy. In fact, he was one of the biggest "gloom and doom" prophets in the Bible, and there were several of those. He was such a depressing person that a word for a tale of woe was created using his name. It's not a word we use often but another name for an extended, especially bitter complaint or lament is a "jeremiad."

To be fair to Jeremiah, he was living in some pretty awful times. The Kingdom of Judah had been corrupt and was going to fall into the hands of a

foreign army. The Temple in Jerusalem, the great symbol of national and religious pride, was going to be destroyed and Judah's leading citizens were going to be carried off into exile. And the Lord had chosen Jeremiah to foresee all this and warn the people. As you might have guessed, the people didn't listen. They never do. No wonder Jeremiah was such a "gloomy Gus." When you have to speak the word of the Lord, and that word is not what people want to hear, you are not going to win any popularity contests. Jeremiah sure didn't.

If you would read Jeremiah's prophecy you would read about thirty chapters of jeremiads, indictments of sinners and predictions of destruction. But then, suddenly in chapter 31, the Lord gives Jeremiah something happy to say. Bible scholars call it "the little book of comfort." Even after all of Jeremiah's horrible predictions would have come true, the Lord would not forget His people. The Lord would not forget His covenant with them. God would redeem them, restore them, and set them free.

God says he would make a new covenant with them. The words "covenant" and "testament" are more or less interchangeable. So, incidentally, this is the only direct reference in the Old Testament, the old covenant, to the New Testament, the new covenant. A new covenant was necessary, the Lord said, because the old covenant had been broken – and God just wasn't talking about Moses smashing the two stone tablets of the Law in anger when he came down the mountain and found the Israelites were worshipping the Golden Calf. The Israelites had violated both the spirit and the letter of God's law. They had not done as they were told. They had forgotten their sacred covenant with God.

This new covenant, the Lord says, will not be written in stone, it will be written on their hearts. That way, it will be impossible for them to forget it. It will be part of who they are. The Lord will be at the very center of their being. We Christians recognize the fulfillment of this in Jesus Christ. The night before Jesus gave his life on the cross, the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus said that the new covenant, a new testament, was being established in his blood.

We who eat and drink Jesus' sacramental body and blood truly become what we eat: we become the body of Christ in the world. Jesus lives in us and we in him. There was a song I learned in Sunday School as a child that expressed as profound a theological truth as any I ever learned in seminary. That song said, "You wonder how I know Jesus lives. I know he lives because he lives inside my heart."

The reality the Lord looked forward to was a day when everyone would have Jesus in their heart, a day where people would just naturally follow Him, a day when Sunday Schools and First Communion classes would be unnecessary because everyone would have a perfect relationship with the Lord. There'd be nothing left for us to learn about God, we'd already know it all. That will be paradise.

Will there be sin in paradise? Of course not! Will there be even a memory of sin in paradise? No. And that gets back to my question from earlier: Does God ever forget anything? What does the Lord say in Jeremiah 31:34, "...I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." I will

remember their sin no more! Does God ever forget anything? Yes, he does – he forgets our sin. God forgets our sin! It's not because He's a doddering old deity and it's not because He's overwhelmed with the responsibilities of His creation. God forgets his sin because he loves us.

Now I want to illustrate that with a reference that might shock you. Do you remember televangelist Jimmy Swaggert? For those of you too young to remember, Jimmy Swaggert had made a fortune and built an empire preaching on TV and traveling from city to city for crusades. To be honest, I never cared for his style or his theology much, and I was not surprised when he was caught in a sex scandal in 1987 that virtually ruined him. In February 1988 he made a speech apologizing for actions. He apologized to his wife and family, and his church and denomination, and to everyone else affected by his actions. And then, before reading Psalm 51, as we did earlier today, he apologized to God Himself.

Whether or not Jimmy Swaggert was sincere in his apology is not for me to decide or for you to decide, that's for God to decide. But old Jimmy said the exact right words to the Lord, whether he knew it or not, drawing on Jeremiah 31:34. He said, "And most of all, to my Lord and my Savior, my Redeemer, the One whom I have served and I love and I worship. I bow at His feet, who has saved me and washed me and cleansed me. I have sinned against You, my Lord. And I would ask that Your precious blood would wash and cleanse every stain, until it is in the seas of God's forgetfulness, never to be remembered against me anymore." Let me repeat that last line again: "And I would ask that Your precious blood would wash and cleanse

every stain, until it is in the seas of God's forgetfulness, never to be remembered against me anymore.”

That’s beautiful. Imagine all your sins, washed away by Jesus’ blood, going down the drain and into the Seas of God’s Forgetfulness. I want my sins to be forgotten like that. We love a forgetful God, a God who loves us enough to forget our sins. If God loves us enough to forget our sins, then shouldn’t we forget our sins too? Earlier in the service you heard the absolution, that in Christ your sins are forgiven. Whatever you had done up to that point in your life God has already forgotten, so you can forget it to. Have you sinned? Forget about it. Broken promises? Forget about it? Been unfaithful to God? Forget about it? But now that Jesus lives in your heart, “Go and sin no more.”

And if God has forgotten our sins, shouldn’t we forget others’ sins as well? Had a bad childhood? Forget about it. Someone in your family not fair to you? Forget about it? Somebody rude to you? Forget about it. Forgiving and forgetting may be the spiritually healthiest thing we can do. Jesus died so that sins might be forgotten.

Let us pray. Thank you, God. Thank you for remembering me but forgetting my sins. Help me, Lord, to forget both my sins and the sins of others. Amen.