

The Forgetting God

Sunday, June 28, 2020

Psalm 13

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Jill Price forgets nothing. She can remember just about everything that ever happened to her. She does not remember lists, but she had total recall about events she had experienced. For example, she could remember the dates she saw the dentist from five years before, and what she did on any Christmas Day.

Jill is blessed with “Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory” (HSAM). It is simply impossible for Jill to forget things. Researchers believe that as few as 50 people in the world have HSAM. Then there’s God, who doesn’t just have “highly superior” memory; God has the highest form of memory because God *is* memory.

Yet, curiously, God can forget. To the psalmist David, it seems apparent that God has forgotten him. “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” (v. 1). Then David asks, “Can you really forget me forever?” And he doesn’t let up: “How long will you hide your face from me?” (v. 1).

This evokes the image of the “hidden God,” or the “idle God” who withdraws from the world to let creation and its inhabitants fend for themselves. In God’s perceived absence, it may feel as if God forgets us. Four times David’s complaint begins with “How long ...?”

This lament sounds very much like the breakup of a relationship. The tone is raw, bitter, harsh. Unfortunately for David, no answer comes from God. David gets no closure or relief. He is left with nagging doubts and dark despair. Honestly, we all have those moments when we think God is away from the phone, not picking up, so God clearly does not care. It appears as if God has run out on us, abandoned us, and left no forwarding address. Sometimes we feel forgotten by God.

But the thing is, there are some things that God cannot forget, *and you are one of them*. God may be all-powerful, but this is the one thing that God cannot do. God cannot forget you. There is a remarkable passage in Isaiah that begins by noting that “Zion” complains that “the Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.”

But then, a rhetorical question is posed: “Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?” (Isaiah 49:14-16). The text continues by asserting that it is more likely that a mother will forget her child than God will forget us; and we know that is not going to happen.

Then, there is this addendum: “See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands...” (49: 16). Think on that: we are tattooed on the palm of God’s hand! It was common in ancient days for a slave to bear the mark of a master on the arm or palm. A soldier might write the name of his commanding officer on his hand. A religious acolyte might do the same thing with the name of her God.

Here, God is saying that the Divine Creator of the universe inscribes us in the palm of God’s hand. God cannot forget us.

We are right there in his palm! Tattooed in the hollow of the hand of God! That is beyond amazing! God *cannot* forget us.

However, there some things God can forget. God has a perfect memory, except for some curious gaps or lapses. When a child of God repents of sin, rebellion, disobedience, mistakes, and wrongdoing, and when that same child asks God's forgiveness, then God acts like most parents: God forgives. What parent can resist a child who comes running and crying with remorse and regret? Of course, the child receives forgiveness and the human parent probably forgets about the infraction in due time. How often has someone apologized to you, and you wave your hand and say, "Aw, forget about it. No worries"? It seems God can and will forget our sins.

God says, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34). God also says, "I am [the One] who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43:26). In the New Testament, we read: "For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12).

And in the psalms, perhaps the same voice complaining about being forgotten by God, is now writing these words: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is [God's] steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far [God] removes our transgressions from us" (103:11-12).

At the end of Psalm 13, even David comes around. After complaining that God forgets him, he admits: "But, I trusted in

your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me" (vv. 5-6). David begins to understand that although God can never forget us, God can forgive and forget our sins.

Many people would say that Jill Price is blessed by her remarkable memory. Her abilities certainly come in handy in her job as an administrative assistant at a law firm. But often her memories arise unbidden, chaotic, and unwelcome. "Imagine being able to remember every fight you ever had with a friend, every time someone let you down, all the stupid mistakes you've ever made." She remembers all this stuff. God doesn't. God forgets the bad stuff, which means we can, too.

Our God is filled with compassion and mercy. God is slow to anger and does not dealt with us according to our sins. Instead, God, in Jesus Christ, pays the last full measure that our sins are forgiven. This gift of forgiveness makes us able, with the power of Holy Spirit, to choose to forgive, renew, and live again in right relationship with each other and with our God. Thanks be to God! Amen.

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