

Remembering Jesus

WE HUMAN BEINGS are forgetful by nature. I do not mean in a finite sense but in a fallen sense. We forget because we choose to forget—at least that is the case when it comes to our response to God’s character and covenant and commands, to his ways and works and words. We forsake our Maker because we choose to forget our Maker.

Biblical history testifies to this truth, especially the Old Testament. In Eden, Adam chooses to forget the goodness of God in giving him the freedom and pleasure to eat from every tree of the garden, bar one (Gen. 2:15–17). After the flood, Noah forgets the righteousness of God that he had preached about prior to the flood: he becomes drunk and is defiled by his son (Gen. 9:20–25). In Canaan, Abraham forgets the promise of God that he would provide him with a son from Sarah’s womb; instead, he takes matters into his own hands with Hagar (Gen. 16:1–6). Israel forgets God’s promise to be with them as he leads them out of Egypt; they complain of

his absence in the wilderness (Exod. 17:7). Before entering the land, God warns Israel repeatedly to “take care” lest they “forget” the Lord once they are in the land (Deut. 4:9, 23; 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19; 9:7; 25:19; 26:13). When they enter the Promised Land, they fare no better. Not long after the conquest under Joshua, a generation grows up that does not know the Lord or the work that he has done for Israel (Judg. 2:10); they forget the Lord their God and serve the Baals (Judg. 3:7; cf. 1 Sam. 12:9). Israel’s kings are also forgetful of God and his covenant and commands. Saul forgets to devote the enemy to complete destruction; as a result, the kingdom is stripped from him (1 Sam. 15:10–23). David forgets the commandments of God and steals another man’s wife, committing adultery with her (2 Sam. 11); as a consequence, the son conceived by his affair dies and his family dissolves into bitter and deadly infighting (2 Sam. 13–18). Solomon forgets the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of his wisdom; he exchanges wisdom for folly and is led into idolatry (1 Kings 11:1–8); in so doing, the kingdom splits (1 Kings 11:11–13). During the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah, the prophets spotlight forgetfulness as a besetting sin of God’s people (Isa. 17:10; 51:13; Jer. 2:32; 3:21; 13:25; 18:15; 23:27; Ezek. 22:12; 23:25; Hos. 2:13; 4:6; 8:14; 13:6). In the end, Israel’s forgetfulness leads them into exile where they are made not to forget the judgment of God.

Forgetfulness. Since the day Adam transgressed the commandment concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we have been a race prone to forgetfulness. Forgetfulness reflects fallenness; it is a manifestation of our human condition in Adam. Forgetfulness is another way of describing disobedience. Israel and her kings “forget” the Lord their God by disobeying and forsaking him (cf. Jer. 2:29 and 2:32;

3:21). We forsake because we forget. And we forget because we choose to forget—deliberately, willfully, consciously. We forget our Creator—his character and covenant and commands, his ways and works and words; we forget our Redeemer—his promises and precepts, his redemption and righteousness. Moses captures well Israel’s problem and ours:

You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you,
And you forgot the God who gave you birth.
(Deut. 32:18)

Given this aspect of our fallen humanity, it is unsurprising to find commands in the Old and New Testaments to “remember” God and what he has done for us. In the Old Testament, we are exhorted to “remember” God as our Creator in the days of our youth (Eccl. 12:1); we are encouraged to “remember” him as our Redeemer and “the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered” (Ps. 105:5). The psalmist exhorts us, “Bless the LORD . . . and forget not all his benefits” (Ps. 103:2). This kind of remembrance has formal expression in Israel’s weekly observance of the Sabbath and their yearly observance of various festivals.

Most of these festivals point Israel back to events in their past, serving to remind them of what God has done on their behalf, so that they will not forget him. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of the rest that God entered following his work of creation; it is a reminder to Israel that they too should rest at the end of their working week. In the Passover, Israel remembers their redemption by God from the angel of death and from their enemy, the Egyptians; the victory is further commemorated in the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread; in the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), Israel remembers the giving

of the law at Sinai, as well as offering the firstfruits of their wheat harvest to the Lord; on the Day of Atonement, Israel recalls their sins of the past year, repents of them with fasting and prayer, and asks God to forgive them through sacrifices offered by the high priest; in the Feast of Tabernacles, Israel contemplates God's faithfulness in their forty years of tent dwelling in the wilderness; and in the Feast of Purim, God's people are reminded of his gracious protection of them through Esther and Mordecai unmasking the evil plot of Haman to annihilate the Jewish people.

For Israel, these festivals serve as weekly and yearly reminders of God's gracious work in creation and redemption, and as such, they encourage God's people to remember the Lord and forget not all his benefits. They are times and seasons of remembrance for a forgetful people. But they also point forward. The weekly Sabbaths and yearly feasts are shadows of things to come—their substance belongs to Christ (Col. 2:16–17). As events in history, they become yearly memorials, serving as types of Christ and his redeeming work. The Sabbath serves as a type of the rest to come in a new heavens and a new earth, where there will be no evening and no morning. This rest is inaugurated by Christ, the “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matt. 12:8), who says to sinners restless in their sin, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). The Passover serves as a type of Christ's death as our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), who was sacrificed to rescue us from death and free us from our enemies. The Feast of Firstfruits serves as a type of Christ in his resurrection being the firstfruits of the final resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23); it also points to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33), who is the guarantee of our future

inheritance (Eph. 1:13–14). The Day of Atonement serves as a type of when Christ offered himself on the cross as a sacrifice and priest so that God can remember our sins no more (Heb. 9:11–14). The Feast of Tabernacles recalls not only Israel’s dwelling in tents but also God’s own dwelling with them in the tabernacle (Exod. 25:7); as such, it points forward to the Word becoming flesh and tabernacling among us (John 1:14). The Feast of Purim signposts the time when another redeemer would arise from among God’s people and turn the devil’s plot on its head, rescuing us from eternal destruction (Col. 1:13–14; 2:13–15).

In the New Testament, these events, and their accompanying memorial festivals, come to their fulfilment in Jesus Christ—the Lord of the Sabbath, the Passover Lamb, the once-for-all atoning sacrifice and perfect High Priest, the Word made flesh, the conqueror of the devil’s schemes. As a result, the ceremonies cease with his coming. The shadows give way to the reality. But they do not change the fact that God’s people remain forgetful. While the typological “reminders” cease with Jesus’s arrival, the encouragement for God’s people to remember remains. Jesus challenges his disciples about their “not remembering” his miracles (Matt. 16:9; Mark 8:18). It is the same with his teaching: he teaches his disciples and then exhorts them to “remember” what he has taught them (John 15:20; 16:4). He also inaugurates the Lord’s Supper, a meal to be received “in remembrance” of him (Matt. 26:26–28). The apostles bring to remembrance the words of Jesus in their teaching (Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). As an encouragement to Timothy to press on in the ministry as a faithful soldier of Christ, Paul exhorts him to “remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as

preached in my gospel” (2 Tim. 2:8). While Paul does not flesh out how Timothy or the church is to “remember Jesus Christ,” the command is clear. Remembering Jesus is a divinely inspired, apostolic imperative.

Throughout its history the Christian church has remembered Jesus by gathering each week for worship on the Lord’s Day. Jesus is remembered in the preaching of his word, the singing of hymns and psalms, the affirmation of creeds, and the saying of prayers, including the Lord’s Prayer. He is also remembered in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the bread symbolizing his body; the wine, his blood. Each time we participate in the Supper, we take and eat “in remembrance” of him. In short, the remembrance of Jesus has been expressed in the liturgy of the Christian church for over two millennia through the simple preaching of the gospel and the faithful administration of the sacrament. Each Lord’s Day, whether it be the expositional word or the edible sacrament, Christians remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. This has been so since the days of the apostles.

However, since the days of the early church, Christians have also observed times in the church calendar for a more focused remembrance of key moments in the life of our Lord. Advent has served as a time to consider his second coming as we reflect on his first coming. Christmas Day has been set aside as a time to celebrate Christ’s birth and to reflect on the great mystery of the incarnation. New Year’s Day has been marked as the day to remember Christ’s circumcision. The days during Pascha—Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Resurrection Sunday—have served as a time to meditate on Christ’s life, death, burial, and resurrection. Ascension Sunday and Pentecost Sunday

mark the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. The origins of observing Pascha go back at least to the middle of the second century; a Paschal homily by Melito of Sardis, an early Christian apologist, indicates that the festival was well established in his day. The tradition of observing Lent, a forty-day period of fasting, developed later and received more formal status following the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Ascension and Pentecost observance are also of great antiquity.

Observing evangelical feast days, particularly those around Easter, is an honored tradition in certain branches of the Reformed church, though not so much the extended period of fasting during Lent.⁶ For example, the Belgic Confession of 1561 allows for such ordinances to be observed, while the Second Helvetic Confession, written in 1562 by Heinrich Bullinger, views the feast days as a matter of Christian liberty but nevertheless as beneficial to observe. The Old Palatinate Liturgy, collated with the Heidelberg Catechism to form the Palatinate Church Order of 1563, encourages the observance of feast days. In the Dutch Reformed Church, the observance of Christmas, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost was mandated at the Synod of Dort in 1619. Reformer stalwarts such as Wolfgang Capito, Martin Bucer, and Francis Turretin were also in favor of observing these days for the purposes of meditation, edification, and thanksgiving. Today, apart from rare exceptions, nearly all Protestant denominations observe Pascha in some demonstrable way, including most Presbyterian denominations. Of course, remembering Jesus

6 See Daniel R. Hyde, "Not Holy but Helpful: A Case for the 'Evangelical Feast Days' in the Reformed Tradition," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 26 (2015): 131–49, for a helpful overview.

is something we do each Lord's Day, but there is also spiritual benefit in setting aside a period in the church calendar each year to meditate more deliberately on the key events of his redeeming work.

This affirmation of the feasts days not only continues the practice of the early church; arguably, it continues the practice of the apostles.⁷ The apostle Paul, for example, arranges his travel plans around liturgical days in the Jewish-Christian calendar: he sails away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread (following Passover) (Acts 20:6) and makes a point of hastening to Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16); on another occasion, he remains in Ephesus until Pentecost has passed (1 Cor. 16:8). Given the connection between Passover and the Lord's Supper, and given the redemptive-historical significance of Pentecost for the burgeoning Christian church in places like Philippi and Ephesus, it seems difficult to interpret Paul's travel arrangements as serving merely evangelistic purposes.

The aim of this devotional liturgy, designed for daily worship from Pascha to Pentecost, is to prepare us better for the season in which we remember the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—all while we wait for his return. To be clear, the season is not about what we can do for Christ by our work or prayers or fasting; rather, it is about what he has done for us in his work and prayers and fasting—a work that began in his life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit, and which will conclude in his return in glory. In the meantime, as we wait for Christ to

7 See Hyde, "Not Holy but Helpful," 145.

complete his work in the final resurrection, we remember our Savior weekly and yearly, singing with Bernard of Clairvaux:

O sacred Head, now wounded,
with grief and shame weighed down,
now scornfully surrounded
with thorns, thine only crown!

O sacred Head, what glory,
what bliss till now was thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call thee mine.

Format for Daily Worship from Pascha to Pentecost

THIS DAILY WORSHIP DEVOTIONAL consists of forty-eight days of set liturgy for the season of Pascha to Pentecost. The date of Pascha (Easter) is different each year because early Christians aimed to link Pascha to Passover, the Jewish festival. Since the Jewish calendar is based on solar and lunar cycles, the dates for Passover and Pascha change each year. In terms of astronomy, the celebration of Easter coincides with the first Sunday following the Pascha full moon, the first full moon after the spring or autumnal equinox, depending on whether one lives in the northern or southern hemisphere.⁸ In terms of the yearly calendar, Pascha can occur on any Sunday between March 22 and April 25. Since the date of Pascha changes each year, this daily devotional is marked by days rather than dates. It consists of

⁸ The equinox is a time when the sun is directly above the Equator and day and night are of equal length.

forty-two days of daily worship followed by six traditional days of observance from Pascha to Pentecost: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Resurrection Sunday, Ascension Sunday, and Pentecost Sunday.⁹ For the purposes of this devotional, the season of Pascha begins forty-six days before Resurrection Sunday, traditionally known as the first day of Lent (Ash Wednesday).¹⁰ However, this liturgy of daily worship is not intended to be associated with the traditions of Lent, such as fasting or carrying the sign of the cross on Ash Wednesday; the only association is the general period of forty-plus days as the season for meditating afresh on the work of Christ—his temptations, entry into Jerusalem, trial, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The order of the elements in the liturgy is fixed and repeated each day, while the content of the elements changes except for the Lord's Prayer and postlude. The order and content of the elements is as follows, accompanied by a rubric to make the liturgy interactive:

Meditation

Reflect on these words about the passion of the Lord Jesus:

Forty-eight meditations from church history

Call to Worship

Hear God call you to worship through his word:

Forty-eight Scripture readings (alternating Old Testament and New Testament daily)

9 Ascension Sunday and Pentecost Sunday have been observed in some churches within the Reformed tradition since the sixteenth century and hence are also included here.

10 Strictly speaking the period of Lent—from Ash Wednesday to Resurrection Sunday—is forty-six days in total; it is forty days if Sundays during this period are excluded.

Adoration

Say or sing this praise to God:

Forty-eight hymns or psalms from church history relevant to the season of Pascha to Pentecost (a psalm occurs every seven days)

Reading of the Law

Hear God's law as his will for your life:

Seven Scripture readings (repeated weekly)

Confession of Sin

Confess your sins to God:

Forty-eight prayers from church history (a prayer by Martin Bucer is repeated on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Resurrection Sunday, Ascension Sunday, and Pentecost Sunday)

Assurance of Pardon

Receive these words of comfort from God:

Forty-eight Scripture readings (alternating Old Testament and New Testament daily)

Creed

Confess what you believe about the Christian faith:

Apostles' Creed | Nicene Creed | Athanasian Creed (3 parts)
(repeated weekly in a chiasm: Apostles' | Nicene | Athanasian
1, 2, 3 | Nicene | Apostles')

Praise

Say or sing this praise to God:

Gloria Patri (traditional) | Doxology (traditional) | Gloria Patri (alternative 1) | Doxology (alternative) | Gloria Patri (alternative 2)

(each repeated weekly; Maundy Thursday–Pentecost Sunday, one each day)

Catechism

Receive this instruction from one of the church's catechisms:

Select Q&As from Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Shorter Catechism related to the work of Christ to save us from our sin (1–2 questions daily)

Prayer for Illumination

As you read his word, ask God to enlighten your mind and heart:

Seven prayers from church history (repeated weekly)

Scripture Reading

Read this portion of God's word: . . .

Select readings from Old and New Testaments relevant to the season of Pascha to Pentecost: Old and New Testament readings about the work of Christ prior to Pascha week; then readings from Lamentations and the passion narrative during Pascha week; readings for Ascension and Pentecost occur on those respective Sundays

Prayer of Reflection

Say or sing this prayer to God:

Days 1–42

Liturgical prayers or praises from church history (repeated weekly): *Benedictus* | *Sanctus* | “Savior, When in Dust to Thee” (verse 1) | “By Thy Helpless Infant Years” (verse 2) | “By the Sacred Grievs That Wept” (verse 3) | “By Thine Hour of Dire Despair” (verse 4) | “By Thy Deep Expiring Groan” (verse 5)

Maundy Thursday–Resurrection Sunday

Liturgical prayers or praises from church history: Maundy Thursday: “Go to Dark Gethsemane” (verse 1) and “Follow to the Judgment Hall” (verse 2) | Good Friday: “Calvary’s Mournful Mountain Climb” (verse 3) | Holy Saturday: “Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle” (all verses) | Resurrection Sunday: “Hasten Early to the Tomb” (verse 4)

Ascension Sunday and Pentecost Sunday

Liturgical prayers or praises from church history: Ascension Sunday: “Bring Us, O Lord God, at Our Last Awakening” | Pentecost Sunday: “Come Down, O Love Divine” (all verses)

Prayer of Intercession

As you make your requests to God, pray this prayer:

More than fifty prayers from church history

Further Petition

- Personal
- Church
- World

Lord’s Prayer

In closing, pray the words that Jesus taught us to pray:

Traditional or modern version (repeated daily)

Benediction

Receive by faith this blessing from God:

Seven benedictions (repeated weekly): Numbers 6:24–26 | Romans 15:13 | 2 Corinthians 13:14 | Ephesians 3:20–21 | 1 Thesalonians 5:23–24 | 2 Peter 1:2 | Jude 24–25

Postlude

In closing, say or sing this praise to God:

Doxology based on Psalm 72:17–19 (repeated daily)

As in *Be Thou My Vision*, the fixed order of the elements is to aid concentration, while the variety of content in the elements is to avoid boredom. The repetition of Scripture readings, prayers, creeds, praises, benedictions, and postludes (repeated every seven days or, in some cases, daily) encourages familiarity and memorization. If one follows this liturgy of worship each day and repeats it throughout the season of Pascha to Pentecost, then one will become well acquainted with the creeds of the Christian church and also historic (and seasonal) prayers throughout church history—some of which were written for corporate worship on the Lord’s Day, others of which were written for personal or family worship on any day, and still others of which were written for the season. After the set prayer of intercession, there is a time for further petitions covering personal, church, or world matters, as the individual or family desires. The Lord’s Prayer, which closes the time of intercessory prayer, may be said in the version with which one is most familiar. (The modern version is provided in the liturgy.) Each day’s liturgy closes with a scriptural benediction followed by a doxological postlude based on Psalm 72:17–19.

If one is using the liturgy for personal worship, then the rubric may be read silently, as if one is being led in worship. If one is using the liturgy for family worship, then the person leading may read the rubric aloud, while other family members might wish to read some of the prayers or Bible passages to ensure a collective participation. In either case, it is best practice to read the content of the elements aloud. This adds

a level of formality that will help concentration and deepen a sense of worship. The musical tunes for the three versions of the *Gloria Patri*, the two versions of the Doxology, and the postlude doxology based on Psalm 72:17–19 are indicated in Appendix 1. The ribbons serve to help the worshiper(s) (1) mark the day; (2) mark the appendix for the musical tunes for the hymns or psalms of adoration as well as the different versions of *Gloria Patri* and Doxology; and (3) mark the seasonal reading plan if one wishes to have a comprehensive view of the Scripture readings covered from Pascha to Pentecost. In practice, the daily worship time (allowing for the allocated Bible reading, usually a single chapter) will take about 15 to 20 minutes. On days when circumstances may restrict one's time more than other days, the liturgy allows for flexibility by dropping some of the elements, such as the meditation, the creed and/or catechism, and the postlude. If some days are missed in the week or season, then one may use the Lord's Day to catch up on the seasonal Bible readings in order to enjoy the full scriptural focus on the work of Christ.

Since the beginning of time, it has been God's plan to fill heaven and earth with the praise of his name. By grace, we have been swept up into this plan through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. This liturgy of daily worship from Pascha to Pentecost aims to help us worship God by meditating on the great work of his salvation as revealed in the person of his Son.

On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. (Ps. 145:5)