

Sermon IV

"The Advantages of Remembering Christ"

by

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"This do in remembrance of me."

Luke 22:19

To be remembered when we are dead by those whom we love seems to be one of the strongest desires that nature has implanted in our hearts. Hence, when we are about to die, tokens of affection are given and bequeathed to our friends, and after our death our graves are preserved and memorials erected to perpetuate our names. Neither is there anything sinful in this wish. Jesus himself felt and indulged it. When he took his last farewell of the beloved disciples, who had been his companions upon earth, we find him anxious that they should not forget him and, therefore, institutes a memorial of his dying love: *"He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me.'"*

Neither was it by his first disciples only that Jesus wished to be remembered. He still desires to live in the memory and hearts of all his people, and says to each of us this very day, in his word and in his ordinances, "Remember me." O then let us keep this dying request of Jesus ever in our minds and strive to embalm him in our hearts!

To assist us in this work of gratitude and love, let us inquire, first, what is implied in remembering Christ; second, why he has left us this command to remember him; and third, what are the benefits resulting to ourselves from a habitual remembrance of him.

I.

What is implied in remembering Christ.

1. There is evidently implied in this remembrance *a knowledge of him*, a previous acquaintance with him. We cannot be called upon to remember an object with which we are altogether unacquainted or a person whom we never knew. Neither can we with any propriety be said to remember Christ till we have in some degree become acquainted with him, seen his excellency, and admired his loveliness.

Nor is it a superficial knowledge of the Savior that will lead us to a habitual remembrance of him. It is the friend whom we have known intimately that lives in our memory, while the mere acquaintance is soon forgotten. We must therefore not only have heard and read of Christ, but have often had him before us. We must have been, as it were, in his society and tasted the sweets of friendship and communion with him. He must have occupied much of our thoughts, have entered into our hearts, and been lodged in the deepest recesses of our minds.

2. Hence to remember Christ implies, second, *a heartfelt love for him*. Who are the persons whom we remember? Those whom we love. It is the departed parent and child, the lost husband and wife whose memory we love to preserve and over whose graves we can still weep. Thus, if we would remember a dying Savior, we must first learn to love him; to love him not with a cold veneration and regard merely, but with a lively, heartfelt, tender affection--with a love which will make us often think of him, often talk of him, pray to him, and praise him. We must love him as that poor woman loved him, who washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head; and as that noble Paul loved him, who counted all things but loss that he might win him, and who could stand up among weeping friends and say, "*I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.*"

3. Hence to remember Christ implies also *a frequent and affectionate recalling of him to our minds*. We are not merely to recollect him and think of him when we hear others speak of him, and when we are in his house or at his table. We are to maintain a habitual remembrance of him--to carry him constantly about with us in our hearts wherever we go, to have him as our companion in all our employments, our pleasures, our sorrows, and our cares.

This remembrance too must be affectionate. It must interest the feelings and touch the heart. It will not indeed always affect us in the same degree, for we are not always equally susceptible of the same tender impressions. The heart even of the established Christian is often cold and dead; so dead that nothing seems to have power to move it. But even in its coldest seasons a thought of Jesus will sometimes warm and enliven it. The remembrance of his dying love seems to restore the soul to its wonted feeling and to reanimate its lifeless powers. There are seasons in the Christian's life in which the name of Jesus comes to his heart like a live coal from the altar, and brings with it a warmth, a feeling, and a joy which an angel might come down from heaven to share.

Without some degree of this affection, our remembrance of Christ, however frequent, is an empty, formal thing. It is no criterion of sincere love to him and proves nothing as to our character. The faithful wife, when she thinks of a husband in the grave, does not think of him with cold indifference. A tender parent does not think unmoved of the moldering corpse of a beloved child. Religion must be tasted and felt, or it is worth nothing. If it does not get into our affection, it will never save our souls.

To remember Christ then implies a previous acquaintance with him, a heartfelt love for him, and a frequent and affectionate recalling of him to our minds. But who is there among us that thus remembers his Savior? And yet if we do not in some degree thus remember him, we can have no reason to think that we are in the number of his children, but every reason to fear that we are as yet ignorant of his salvation. If we feel for the dying Jesus in the same way only as we feel for the death of a common acquaintance or a man who is almost a stranger to us, we can surely draw no other conclusion than that we are equally unconnected with him, equally estranged from him.

II.

Why Christ has left us this command to remember him.

1. He has done this for a reason, which ought to humble us in the dust. He has said "Remember

me" because he knows that *we are prone to forget him*. It might indeed have been supposed that such a Savior could never for one hour, no nor yet for one moment, have been out of a dying sinner's mind, that his last thoughts in the evening and his first thoughts in the morning would be sweet thoughts of Christ. But is it so with us, brethren? Alas, no! There is reason to fear that many of us seldom or never think of Christ at all, unless when we are reminded of him on the sabbath in his house. We do not indeed endeavor, nor perhaps wish, to forget him at other times; but our heads and hearts are too full of other things to have room for Christ or God to enter into them. The cares and business of the world occupy all the energies of some among us, and dissipations and amusements engross the trifling minds of others.

And how is it with those who have begun in some degree to think and act as rational and immortal beings? Are not their hearts also ever ready to turn aside to vanity. Even they can often suffer [allow] the meanest trifles to intrude into the place of a dying Jesus; and when they have any devout and lively remembrance of his love, it is but for a moment. The savor of it is soon gone and lightness and vanity succeed [take its place].

What a cause for humiliation is here! Why do we not all condemn and abhor ourselves for this base ingratitude? When we have buried a friend whom we love, though he is no better than a creature formed of dust, we carry him about in our hearts, and everything which disturbs our remembrance of him is for a long season sickening to the soul. And yet Jesus, our best and heavenly friend, is forgotten. His agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion, and all he has done and suffered for our souls, can find no abiding lodging place in our remembrance. What reason for shame is here, and what a call for prayer!

Nor is this all. Here is a warning also. Am I thus prone basely to forget my Savior? O then let me fly from every scene, from every society, from every pursuit which has a tendency to lead my thoughts from him. Let me remember this infirmity of my sinful heart, and watch and pray against it, mourn over it, and dread to increase it.

2. But our proneness to forget Christ is not the only reason why he has commanded us to remember him. He has given us this command, second, because *he desires to be remembered by us*. True, he is now in the very highest heavens, seated on a throne raised to an immeasurable height above the thrones of angels, with all the exalted spirits that fill the realms of glory worshipping at his footstool. And yet his eye is fixed on a people on the earth, and his soul is as mindful of them as when he groaned for them in the garden or bled for them on the cross. Unworthy as they are, he loves them. Mean [lowly] as they are, he is not ashamed still to wear their form and to call them brethren. He forgets the songs of angels to listen to their sighs and prayers. It is his delight to minister to their wants [needs], to protect them in their dangers, and to comfort them in their sorrows. Yea, even when they forget him, he thinks on them. He watches over and pities them when they are turning aside to vanity; and as soon as they have tasted the bitterness of their wanderings, he restores their soul and leads them again in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Now he does this, and more than this, for his people simply because he loves them; and if he thus loves them, he would not surely be forgotten by them. By his word and ordinances he tells them that he would not, and urges them to think of him. What a stoop [condescension] is this for such a Being to make, and what an honor is here conferred on creatures such as we! How ought it to

elevate our affections and excite our love. Shall he who made the worlds desire to be remembered by us, and we forget him? Shall he who inhabits the praises of eternity call us brethren, and yet shall we forget such a brother in such a place?

III.

The reason why Christ has commanded us to remember him.

The great reason, however, why Christ has commanded us to remember him is this: he knows that we cannot think of him without deriving much benefit to ourselves. What then are the advantages resulting from a habitual remembrance of Jesus? This is our third subject of inquiry. Let us proceed to consider it.

1. The first of those benefits which flow from a remembrance of Christ is *comfort to the soul when wounded by a sense of sin*. What can be more relieving, what more cheering to the contrite heart of a mourning sinner than to think of a Savior who was wounded for his transgressions and bruised for his iniquities; to remember one whose blood cleanses from all sins, who has already saved thousands of the guilty sons of Adam, and who is still inviting all the weary and heavy laden of his sinful race to come unto him for pardon and rest?

It is sweet to think of such a Savior as pouring out his soul an offering for sin, but it is still more sweet to think of him as at this very moment appearing before God for us, standing as the Lamb that has been slain before his throne, and still bearing in his sacred body the marks of his sufferings and death. This surely must be a source of strong consolation to the soul that is really mourning for sin. Here is something to lean on, something which can bear the weight of a sinner's doubts and fears and cares. Only let us once be brought to lean on it, and we shall have strength and peace in every hour of trial. The heavens and the earth may be destroyed on account of the sin which has defiled them, but we shall be safe. Our souls will be unhurt in the mighty wreck.

2. A habitual remembrance of Christ has a tendency *to elevate our affections*, to lead us to set them on things above and not on things on the earth. If we have a lively remembrance of an absent friend, our hearts will often be where he is. Before we are aware, our thoughts will involuntarily take to themselves wings and go to him. Thus we cannot have a remembrance of Christ in our hearts without having those hearts often in heaven. If we could but habitually carry him in our minds, the world would lose much of its power over us. We should have little time and less inclination to share in its vanities. Our souls would no longer cleave to the dust; they would soar to their resting place and center in their God. We should almost live the life of angels upon earth, and all our words and conversation--our whole conduct--would savor of heaven.

3. This heavenly-mindedness would lead us to a third benefit resulting from a remembrance of Christ: *patience and comfort in our trials and affections*. This is the use the apostle makes of this remembrance in his epistle to the Hebrews: "Consider him," says he, "that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Consider *what* he suffered, [both] the greatness [and] the intensity of his agonies. Consider *how* he suffered, how patiently and cheerfully. "He was oppressed and he was afflicted . . . He was

brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." Consider *why* he suffered: "He had done no sin, neither had any guile been found in his mouth. He died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

These considerations, my brethren, if they had their proper effect on our minds, would repress all disposition to impatience and murmuring when we are in affliction. Did Christ, who was altogether sinless, suffer so much and suffer so patiently (and that for such a being as I am) and shall I, who am altogether guilty, be impatient and complaining in the hour of my light afflictions? What are my sufferings when compared with my Savior's agonies? Let me then be ashamed of my complaints. Let me endeavor to get the lamb-like spirit of my Master. Let me strive to change my murmurs for praises, my sighs for songs.

4. The remembrance of Christ has a tendency also *to keep alive in our minds a holy hatred of sin*. Nothing makes sin appear half so hateful as the cross of Christ. Nothing so effectually checks it when rising in the soul as the thought of a dying Savior. Did Jesus suffer for my sins? Was he wounded for my transgressions and bruised for my iniquities? And shall I trifle with sin? Shall I play with it as though it were a harmless thing? It nailed the man, who is Jehovah's fellow, to a cross. And has it no cross, no sting, no dreadful curse for my soul? Was it for my sins that Christ died? And cannot I deny a single lust nor resist a single temptation for his sake?

O let me never thus crucify the Son of God afresh! Let me turn my back on every scene and every society which would tempt me thus to pierce my Savior. Let me watch and pray against iniquity. Let me trample it underneath my feet. Let me steel my heart against all its treacherous pleasures. It may for a moment seem sweet to my foolish heart, but it cost my Savior tears and blood.

Such are some of the advantages, and only some of them, resulting from a habitual remembrance of Christ. This remembrance has a tendency also to increase our love for the Redeemer, to excite in us a stronger spirit of obedience to his commands, to reconcile us to death, and to teach us to look forward to eternity with joy. Who then, in a world so full of sin, of sorrow, and temptation as this, would not desire to remember Jesus?

But it is no easy task, my brethren, to obey this command of Christ. It is an easy thing to fill our hearts with sin and vanity, but it is hard indeed to fix in them the remembrance of a Savior's name. None but God can enable us to perform the work. He only can imprint on our hearts the name of Christ, and he only can preserve it there. The vanities of every passing hour can, and often will, efface it; and God himself must write it again and again, or Jesus will be forgotten. Here then *we may see our need of prayer*. But let us not stop here.

We may see our need of exertion also. Must we know Christ before we can remember him? Then let us seek to know him, to get every day a closer and more heartfelt acquaintance with his excellencies, his offices, and his ways. We may study Christ and his gospel for ages and yet find much in them to learn. There is a depth in them to which the minds of angels, after ages of inquiry, have never yet penetrated; and a height to which they have not climbed. Let the Bible, then, which testifies of Jesus, be often in our hands and still more often in our hearts.

Are we prone to forget Christ? Then let us not only avoid as much as possible everything that

seems calculated to increase the propensity, but let us also seek after those things which have a tendency to counteract and overcome it. Let us often speak to one another of Christ. Our social parties would be much more delightful, and much more rational too, if the name of Jesus were more often heard in them, his gospel more frequently spoken of, and his memory more affectionately cherished. We love to talk of relatives and friends who are moldering in their graves. Why then is the dying Jesus always to be forgotten? Is there no savor in his memory? Are there no sweet associations connected with his sacred name? All our employment and happiness in heaven will be to speak of him and sing of him. And surely we might begin this work of heaven here, and find happiness in it also, if we were not wanting to ourselves.

But if we would habitually remember Jesus, let us not forget the command given us in the text: "This do in remembrance of me." We soon forget objects which are removed from our sight; and our Lord, who knows and pities this weakness of our nature, has given us an abiding memorial of himself. He has appointed an ordinance for this very purpose, to remind us of his love. The sacrament of the Lord's supper is not designed to blot out our iniquities, as many suppose, but simply to remind us of a dying Savior. It was ordained, as our church tells us, for a continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ. "There we see Jesus evidently set forth before our eyes crucified among us," so plainly set forth, that if we have any seriousness of spirit, we shall find it difficult not to see and remember him.

And yet from this ordinance many of us can often turn away without a struggle and without a sigh. What does this conduct prove? Our humility? The tenderness of our conscience? Alas, brethren, it proves much more clearly that the dying request of a crucified Redeemer is forgotten and despised. We do not so treat [in this manner] a departed parent or a friend. His last requests are cherished in the memory, and we almost dread to violate or neglect them. How is it then that Jesus only is despised when he says, "This do in remembrance of me?"

There is reason to fear that we must find an answer to this inquiry not in a tender conscience but in a cold, careless, worldly heart. There the evil lies, and there the remedy must be applied. Ministers may reason with us and expostulate, but our hearts must be changed before we shall go to the Savior's table with a desire of remembering him there. The love of the world and of sin must be rooted out of our souls, and all their energies and affections fixed on God.

Deem not these hard sayings. It is a mere trifling with the matter to stop short of this view of it. The heart must be won to Christ before sacraments and ordinances will be loved by us or be beneficial to our souls. If Christ is not remembered in them, and remembered too with affection, they will be useless to us. They will bring no comfort, no holiness to our hearts, [and] they will leave us just as they find us--trifling and cold, earthly and sinful.

The consequence of such a state as this is obvious. It is as sure and certain too as it is plain. If we do not remember Christ, he will in the end cease to remember us. We need him now, but we shall need him much more soon. And in that great day of our need, which is fast approaching, he will act towards us as we act towards others when we forget them. He will take no interest in anything that concerns us. He will leave us to be our own defenders and saviors, to plead our own cause at the bar of God, and to keep [ward] off with our own feeble arm the stroke of vengeance. He will leave us to perish.

We may not think much now of the misery of being thus forsaken. We may have no spiritual feelings and no dread of spiritual evils in our minds. But the dream of life will soon be ended, and we shall awake in a world where all our dormant powers will be roused to action in all their energy, either by that fullness of joy which fills the exalted minds of angels, or by the bursting wrath of an insulted God. We shall then be forced to feel that there is nothing more desirable for an immortal being than to be remembered by the Lord of glory in his kingdom, and nothing more dreadful than to be forgotten by him there. If he were to forget us even here in this world of mercy, we should be undone. Thousands of our fellow-creatures might remember us, and millions of angels come to our help; but all the inhabitants of earth and of heaven could not supply the place of a departed God. All their united efforts could not keep for one moment our bodies from the grave, nor our souls from destruction.

Who then among us can bear the thought of being forgotten by the Lord Jehovah? Which of us will dare to forget him and be at ease? O may we all be led this very hour to his throne! May each of us offer there, with a contrite heart, this simple prayer, which has never since the day of his agony been offered to him in vain, "Lord, remember me."

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