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SIXTY YEARS A CAUSE FOR REMEMBERING

A few new year thoughts by Rev Ivan Foster as the Free Presbyterian Church approaches its 60th anniversary.

“And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. . . . Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; and thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.” Deuteronomy 8:2, 11-20.

I believe that the Lord would have us REMEMBER His mercy to us over these past sixty years. There are very few around today who were there when the Free Presbyterian cause began in Crossgar on 17th March 1951. Likewise, few of the Israelites to whom Moses addressed these words were old enough to remember the exodus out of Egypt and the miracles God performed as He delivered His people out of bondage and the early years of their pilgrimage. But they would have heard the story repeated to them many times and they would also have had the inspired account written by Moses in what we know as the Book of Exodus and other books of Moses which make up the Pentateuch.

We are all too prone to forget the mercies of God. The effective antidote to that is setting a time for remembering. Let this sixtieth year be a year of REMEMBERING for Free Presbyterians everywhere.

I. WHAT WE ARE TO REMEMBER

Let us remember . . .

1. The path the Lord led us on. “And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no,” Deuteronomy 8:2.

It was a wilderness path. Israel had been on the borders of the promised land 40 years earlier but sin prevented them from entering. “But with whom was he grieved forty years?



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was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief," Hebrews 3:15-19. Times of trial are times of testing. As fire tries metal and removes the dross, so trial reveals those who are true and those who are false. When they were in the wilderness rather than Canaan then unbelief was to blame. The wilderness path was in order to humble Israel and bring to the surface what they really were, to prove them. Such proving is necessary.

Just where is the Free Presbyterian Church today? Is it the wilderness or Canaan? Is FAITH or UNBELIEF at work amongst us today? It will take courage to face up to that question and answer it honestly. Our response will tell whether we are true or false. The true will pine after Canaan but the false will pine after Egypt. I think that we find ourselves today in the wilderness rather than in the midst of the blessedness of Canaan. Oh! we have in former years enjoyed much of the fruit of Canaan. I speak of the 60s and 70s, those times of awakening and revival. But we are not there now and unbelief and disobedience are the cause. God give us grace to see that and confess it honestly before Him and cry unto Him to bring us again into Canaan.

Let us remember . . .

2. The lesson the Lord taught us.

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live." Deuteronomy 8:2-3.

The Lord would teach us the preciousness of the Word of God over all other possessions. We must never neglect its reading, its preaching or its directions and commands. Our services should centre around the reading and preaching of God's Word. Time should be given to the hearing of God's Word. There is a trend toward shortening sermons and departing from the centrality of preaching the Word of God. Some would even say that in this age preaching is not enough!! Just what can a man add to preaching God's Word that will adorn it or improve upon it? What man adds can only corrupt and contaminate and devalue. Preaching the Word of God in the power of the Holy Ghost is the epitome of Heaven's wisdom and the only means of pursuing God's purpose among men.

Let us remember . . .

3. The preservation that we experienced.

"And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years." Deuteronomy 8:3-4.

a. The Lord fed us. How wonderfully and mysteriously, in a manner unknown to our



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fathers, did the Lord meet the physical and spiritual needs of His people.

b. The Lord clothed us. Spiritually, what clothing God has put on us! It does not grow old or need renewing, unlike the garments of Adam's making. The religious exercises of men consist in renewing their religious clothing in an attempt to provide themselves with righteous adornment. The righteousness of Christ, which clothes the elect of God, never needs renewing or mending.

c. The Lord strengthened us. The swelling foot is the common complaint of the pilgrim. The road was hard but God made the walking to have no lasting or ill effect upon the Israelites. That has ever been the experience of the child of God. "Thou hast enlarged my steps under me; so that my feet did not slip," 2 Samuel 22:37. "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not," Psalm 17:5. "When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O LORD, held me up." Psalm 94:18. "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber," Psalm 121:3. These words of the Lord to Israel have their application in the spiritual provisions we enjoy from His bountiful hand. But they also have their temporal application. The Free Presbyterian Church has quite literally been fed and clothed and strengthened by the hand of the Lord. If we as a people have entered upon earthly prosperity and have been enriched with goods, as I know the body of the church to have been, since I can well remember when our denomination was not endowed with the riches that it now enjoys, then it is the Lord's doing and ought to be marvellous in our eyes. Only those of Nebuchadnezzar's spirit credit their own ingenuity and abilities with the enrichment heaven has bestowed upon us.

II. THE CAUSES OF FORGETFULNESS.

1. Plenty. "Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein . . ." Deuteronomy 8:12. For the wicked and the foolish plenty leads to sin. Here is what ruined Sodom. "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy," Ezekiel 16:49. Abundance has made all too many forget their humble origins and idleness has made time for folly and worldliness. What a cursed thing pride is! "Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off," Psalm 138:6. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall," Proverbs 16:18. There is a great need for us all to remember these words lest we fall.

2. Prosperity. "And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied," Deuteronomy 8:13. Every day, I fear that I see prosperity working destruction amongst the people of God. It has, to use an Ulsterism, made some "too big for their boots"! How quickly the poor man that God enriches is inclined to forget his poverty and bethink himself one of the "nobility"!

3. Pride. "Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage . . . And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth," Deuteronomy



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8:14, 17. Christian, in humble thankfulness to God let us remember the failings of the flesh and guard against forgetting God.

III. HOW WE SHOW THAT WE ARE REMEMBERING

1. We keep God's law and commandments. "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day," Deuteronomy 8:11. When you forget the Lord then you forget His law. Faithful observance of the Word of God indicates a constant remembering of the Lord and His mercy.

2. We teach God's law to our children. "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons," Deuteronomy 4:9. Christian parents should dread the idea of their children forgetting the Lord. For that reason I fail to understand how Christians can contemplate sending their children to a state school with its central philosophy of multi-faithism and syncretism. There is an unapologetic attempt underway to drive any semblance of Bible Christianity out of the state education system. Even the Democratic Unionist Party has now publicly embraced the ecumenical philosophy of education that is embodied in the concept of integrated education. Christian parents cannot hope that their children will fare any better in such an environment than did the offspring of Lot in Sodom.

3. We bear witness to the consequences of forgetting God.

a. Fear — "And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" Isaiah 51:13.

b. Tears — "A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God," Jeremiah 3:21.

c. Hell — "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God," Psalm 9:17. These are the consequences of forgetting the Lord and departing from His truth. The comfort and wellbeing of a people lies in walking in obedience to Him. For-sake Him and fear and dread will fill our hearts and our eyes will fill with tears. Even worse, such forgetfulness will lead on to the damnation of future generations. Eternal weeping will be the harvest of such folly. May this our sixtieth year see a turning of our hearts to the Lord.

"Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved," Psalm 80:17-19.