

REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST

*BELIEVING THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH ABOUT THE
ABSOLUTE PERSON IN A RELATIVISTIC AGE*



THOMAS J. NETTLES

REMEMBER JESUS
CHRIST

Remember Jesus Christ

Believing the Absolute Truth about the Absolute Person in a Relativistic Age

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Preface

The theme of the 2024 Founders Conference surrounds Paul's admonition, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel" (2 Tim. 2:8 ESV). God willing, and according to His enlightenment and strength, I want to discuss this sobering theme by focusing on the biblical developments of "remember." The word points to events that are both pivotal and central. Not only do those events alter the direction for humanity, but they rise to a culmination and a subsequent response in thought and deed. The flow of the entire biblical text presses forward to this command: "Remember Jesus Christ."

"Remember" calls to mind central admonitions in the history of God's revelation of redemptive power to His people. The command is not for a mere mental recall of an event or a casual reminder of a person's name or status. It is a critical summons to put an event or person or commitment so at the center of your concern that the weight of its importance transforms your thinking. When the thief said to Jesus,

“Remember me when You come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42), he wanted to be taken personally by Jesus into that status of perfect, sinless, beneficent rulership. Jesus responded with an answer commensurate with the purpose of the request, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). It is as though the Lord were saying, “As surely as My work of atonement will bring Me into the glory of heaven in the presence of the Father, so it will do for you.” The request of the crucified thief was for Jesus’s personal investment in the eternal well-being of his mind, body, and soul—“remember.”

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8) involves not just simple mental recall, but also an investment of life in the rhythm of divine labor. As God worked for six days in creation, so should these redeemed people labor for six days at life-sustaining tasks that deserved their energy. As God finished creation and then rested, so were the people rescued from relentless labor in Egypt to embrace a Sabbath as instituted and practiced by God on the seventh day. All the animals, each member of the family, all the nation would so esteem the glory of the Creator/Redeemer/Covenant God that their lives, individually and corporately, would be defined by it. “Remember Jesus Christ” has that same claim on the lives of His redeemed ones, but with an even greater intensity in light of an even more powerful delivery.

In Genesis 9:15, God said to Noah that He would “remember My covenant” made with the whole earth never again to destroy all flesh by flood. At the appearance of the rainbow

in the cloud (which God Himself makes), “I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature” (Gen. 9:16). God’s promise to remember reflects a decree set in the context of His own integrity, a promise made by the God who does not lie (Titus 1:2).

In Leviticus 26:42 and 45, God referred to remembering His covenant with Abraham and Isaac so that He would not destroy the people entirely when they go into captivity: “I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt.” When God remembers, He conducts Himself in accord with His eternal decree to redeem sinners through a man who would come in the context of a nation and a family, a man whose genealogy is traceable to Abraham and to Adam. The theology of “remember” means that God’s purpose and consequent action of redemption captures the mind and determines actions.

Deuteronomy 6:12 gave a stern warning: “lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” God provided a formula for protection against their fatal forgettings. Generation upon generation should follow this system of instruction.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the door-

posts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:6–9)

The whole life should be lived in the conscious awareness of God’s authority, His commands, His sovereign mercy, the fearful wonder of His distinguishing grace. The words of revelation that He has given, by which the meaning of His historical acts of grace are disclosed, must be an ever-present body of informative truth to His people. We must not forget; it must not pass away from our consciousness that we are saved by free, unmerited, sovereign mercy.

Deuteronomy 8 verses 2, 11, 14, 18, and 19 have an antiphonal chorus that works between the seriousness of the command to remember and the devastation wrought by the tragedy of forgetting. “And you shall remember” (v. 2) refers to the Lord’s provisions and testing in the forty years of wilderness wanderings. This was to focus their lives and their hearts on the revealed Word of God as the source of life (v. 3). Should temporal blessings make them flatter themselves with a sense of independence, they were warned not to “forget the LORD your God” (11) and ignore His commandments. Again verse 14 warned against allowing success in the Promised Land to push aside the obvious dependence that they had on the Lord, even as it was undeniable during the testing of the forty years. If they were tempted to say, “My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth” (v. 17), they again were commanded, “You shall remember the LORD our God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers” (v. 18). “Remember” challenges the mind to

grasp the covenantal mercy of God with such conscientious commitment that nothing can drive a wedge of temporal delusion between the moral and spiritual mind of a person and the infinite power and mercy of divine provision.

When Jesus established the symbol of the final, ultimate, perfect redemptive act, He commanded His followers, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19). When Paul recounted the event for the Corinthians, he connected Jesus’s command of remembrance with the breaking of the bread and the taking of the cup. “This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:24–25). Paul added that such an action was a proclamation of “the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

The command of Paul to Timothy to “remember Jesus Christ,” therefore, reaches deep into the biblical text as a prompt to take to heart the covenantal faithfulness of God. “Remember” means to be in active reflection on the saving mercy contained in the eternal covenant and the consequent redemptive action of God in Jesus Christ.

Introduction

A COMPELLING CALL TO REMEMBER

Paul was designated as a steward to “make the word of God fully known” (Col. 1:25 ESV). “Fully known” meant two things. One, Paul would preach and write without omitting any truth revealed to him. Two, it meant that when the stewardship of this mystery reached its final revealed proposition by those appointed to receive it, it would be complete; it would not come short of anything of revelatory status. This calling laid great demands on Paul. “It is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy” or faithful (1 Cor. 4:2 NASB). Paul had not invented this message or been an entrepreneurial religionist, but he was arrested by God, compelled as it were to this work. “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16).

Though he called the gospel “my gospel” in the text that drives this book (2 Timothy 2:8) and other places, he did not mean that he dreamed it or deduced it or commenced

it, but only that the revelation he himself received is the only gospel and there is no other (Gal. 1:6–12). Paul did not have the option to pick parts of the revelation and leave others behind. He must be a steward of all the essential elements of the gospel: born of woman and Son of God, hell and heaven, repentance and assurance, cross and crown, obedience and grace, incarnation of humility and second appearing in glory. During Paul's life, he made the word of God full through his preaching. The last verse of Acts views Paul in his rented house in Rome “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31 ESV). Collaterally, his situations called for writing letters to churches and persons. In those he reiterated his spoken ministry, and the written manifestations of his message took on the stature of Scripture, the written word of God (1 Thess. 2:13; 5:27; 1 Tim. 6:2b–3, 20; 2 Tim. 1:13–14; 3:10, 14–16; 2 Peter 3:15–16).

Paul preached truths that were hidden in the past from others (Col. 1:26). He emphasized that what was now preached with clarity and conviction formerly was a “mystery.” He wrote the same in Romans 16:25, saying that the preaching of Jesus Christ came according to “the revelation of the mystery kept secret” but has been manifested now. Religious philosophers that lurked among the people spoke much of their mysteries and sought to lead people astray. Their so-called mysteries were lies and delusions, products of their own philosophical imaginations. The apostolic revelation of the mystery pointed to a person, Jesus Christ, who had appeared in the flesh in a specific time and space and fulfilled in His own

body all the expectations of the prophetic writings.

Paul proclaimed Christ. Though the doctrines surrounding Christ form a beautiful system of theology, it is useless and of no account if it does not ultimately arise from and conform to the fullness of who Christ Himself was and is. “Remember Jesus Christ,” Paul said in our driving text. In Paul’s proclamation of Christ, his focus concentrates on the person of the Lord Himself and the work He did that He was uniquely qualified to do. This is a shorthand way of saying that Paul concentrated on the necessary relationship of law and gospel. Though our conduct should reflect righteousness as defined in God’s law, we fall short, we are under condemnation, and we need rescue from the power of darkness (Col. 1:13). We need one who is qualified to perform such a rescue, and that is found only in Christ, the beloved Son of God who, by His righteous labors, has given us both redemption and the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13–14). No marvel, therefore, that Paul would remind Timothy in the context of such absolute consequences, “Remember Jesus Christ.”

Not only did Paul labor to the point of agony (Col. 1:29) to secure a clear view of this infinitely glorious person, but he also suffered as if he were a criminal (2 Tim. 2:9). To the Colossians, he wrote that he rejoiced in his sufferings. It was the necessary consequence of his accurate impassioned presentation of the gospel of Christ. The world is offended by its moral implications on the one hand (i.e., that we are all sinners and deserve hell) and on the other hand holds a snobbish sense of intellectual skepticism concerning its leading af-

firmation (i.e., that God became man and died in the place of hell-deserving sinners). Paul's conversion, his suffering, and his absolute confidence of the revealed truth of his gospel should give serious pause to any person tending to dismiss Paul's articulation of the path to "eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). Even beyond the evidence for the absolute credibility of Paul, we find the imposing uniqueness of Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead as justifying the words of the apostles, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68–69 ESV).

"Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering" (2 Tim. 2:8 ESV).

Remember the Name of Jesus Christ

JESUS AS MESSIAH, PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel” (2 Tim. 2:8 ESV). In supplying the name of the one we are to remember, this passage also supplies the reasons that forgetfulness in this matter is fatal. Paul named the person who embodies the full range of truth and saving grace that counters the falsehoods, errors, and aggressive evil of fallen humanity. As he reminded the Corinthians, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). In the context of the letter to Timothy, Paul used the combination “Christ Jesus” or “Jesus Christ” fourteen times. Two of these also employ the word “Lord” with the name, “Jesus,” and the office, “Christ.” Also, there are fifteen other uses of the word “Lord” to refer to Jesus Christ. The book is saturated with Jesus Christ—His lordship, His mercy, His purpose, His truthful word, His

conquering of death, His promise of life, His salvation, His status as judge, and His personal presence with the believer. Paul aimed to make it impossible to forget either the person or the work of Jesus Christ. To forget is to deny; to deny is to give surety of an absence of grace.

In particular, Paul did not want us to forget the significance of the name and the title given to Him. His name is *Jesus*. The angel told Joseph, calling him “son of David,” that the child with whom Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit was to be called “Jesus” (Matt. 1:20–21). The significance of this designated name was related to the child’s office as Savior—“for He will save His people from their sins.” The name means “Jehovah is salvation.”

For Joshua (the same name) in the Old Testament, his name was a testimony to the promise of Jehovah in giving to Israel the land of Abraham. It signified that Jehovah was strong, mighty, faithful, the only God, and that He would accomplish all His promises, both of blessing and of cursing. He would work through Joshua to fulfill these promises and establish the context where the people would respond to this miraculous deliverance and strikingly clear revelation. Some of the promises were unconditional and unilateral. No alterations among the Israelites could change the ability and determination of God to carry through. Others were conditional and were, in one sense, dependent on the faithfulness of the people (2 Kings 23:26–27).

The task of Joshua was typological; the task for Jesus was

substantive and absolute. Joshua set the stage for the powerful display of divine purpose; Jesus embodied the mystery of godliness. Joshua testified of the power of God to save and called the people to follow him in serving the Lord (Josh. 24); Jesus did not merely testify to the power of God to save, but He possessed and executed His saving power by His own righteous acts and perfect obedience. Not only did Jesus, like Joshua, testify to the power of God to save, but He constituted the saving purpose of God. Though “Jesus” is His human name, it also is a testimony to His divine nature—“Jehovah is salvation.”

As *Christ*, the God–man Jesus is the anointed one. Every office and type established by anointing the Christ culminated in Himself. Did God give prophets to reveal and speak and write His Word to His people? Jesus is the prophet promised through Moses (Deut. 18:15, 18), the Word made flesh (John 1:14), the Son through whom God has spoken (Heb. 1:2). Is He not the true Elisha, the God of supplication, anointed by Elijah (1 Kings 19:16; Luke 1:17; 3:21–22; Luke 23:34; John 1:29–34). Does the Lord not set forth the prophet as a special representative of His anointing? “Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm” (1 Chron. 16:22; Ps. 105:15). Does not Jesus claim that He is the fulfillment of the anointed prophet sent to preach good tidings to the poor, and proclaim liberty to the captives (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18)?

Jesus is priest. As the Levitical priest was anointed to offer sacrifice (Lev. 4:4–5) and sprinkle the blood of the sac-

rifice, Christ offered Himself once-for-all, putting an end to all of the typological sacrifices. Though not of the tribe of Levi, He received a special commission for this purpose (Heb. 7:20; 8:6; 9:12, 24–26). So Jesus Christ, having served as the anointed prophet, then completed His anointed work of priesthood, altar, and sacrifice. Nothing in the sacrificial system was left unfulfilled by Him.

Jesus is king. David was anointed king by Samuel (1 Sam. 16:13). In consequence of the Christ's completed prophetic work and the perfection of His priesthood, He was given His seat "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3), fulfilling the promise to David of the forever king established by God. "And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever" (1 Chron. 17:14). Jesus Christ alone, in all three of His offices, can say, "I have been anointed with fresh oil" (Ps. 92:10).

Nothing else would matter if the next phrase in 2 Timothy 2:8 were not vital to the way we are called upon to remember Jesus Christ. Both the soteriological power and the apologetic coherence of the gospel would fall to the ground, no more to rise, without it. "Risen from the dead" denotes the conquering of the scheme of Satan to oppose the purpose of God in lifting up non-angelic creatures to a position higher than the angels—in fact, to share in some way with the glory of His Son. Jesus did not give aid to angels but was "made like His brethren" and made "propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17), and having "purged our sins" (1:3), destroyed "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil"

(2:14). The wages of sin, the penalty of death for disobedience, unpropitiated through the ages, held as a threat by the devil and verified by divine justice, lost its sting when Jesus “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus Christ, who bore those death-dealing sins, was “raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4). This means that all the holy, righteous, and just attributes of God, the entire weightiness of God, were honored completely by Christ’s death and thus called for the granting of life to the successful sin-bearer. Death, therefore, no longer has any hold on Christ or His people, and Satan’s tool of intimidation has been removed. The work of Christ and the verdict of the Father are communicated in power to the redeemed by the Spirit. “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). God, therefore, instead of being against us is for us. Why? Because He “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32 KJV). Having given us His Son, He freely gives us all that Christ has gained. None can now condemn, for “it is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God.” On top of that He “makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34).

Under the name of Christ, we have already looked briefly at the significance of the phrase “the offspring of David,” or “out of a seed of David.” The use of *spermatos* without the definite article means that the word “seed” does not identify Jesus as *the* seed of David (though that surely follows) but

means that Jesus's birth was "out of (*ek*) a seed of David," that is, his mother Mary. Jesus was conceived in and then born from Mary, a seed of David. Luke 1:27 has the phrase "of the house of David," which is to be applied both to Mary and to Joseph. The seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) was also the seed of David. He descended from David in His human nature and has a right to the throne. "He will be great," the angel told Mary, "and will be called the Son of the Highest. And the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). How low the House had fallen that a teenage virgin was to bear the seed of David, the Messiah, and His legal father would be a mere carpenter. Luke 2:4 again emphasizes that Joseph was "of the house and lineage of David" because the enrollment must take place legally according to the male of the household. When the angel addressed Joseph to inform him of the source of Mary's impregnation, he called him "Joseph, son of David" (Matt. 1:20). Jeremiah 30:9 predicts that "they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king." In Ezekiel we read, "David My servant shall be king over them" (37:24). Hosea predicted that, after a time of devastation, Israel would "seek the LORD their God, and David their king" (Hos. 3:5). This descent from David confirms the prophetic material concerning the Messiah, seals the reality of His humanity, and shows that the true "Man after God's own heart" saves us and rules over us with loving-kindness until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.