

Peace

for the

BROKEN



BY

REGRET

First Sunday
in Advent



By Ben Kratz

Short-Term Memory

Monday, November 28th

Jeremiah 31:34

When I was younger, one of my favorite games to play was Milton Bradley's *Memory*. I grew up with three older siblings, and there was no chance they would let me win with other games. But with *Memory* I knew I had a chance. I would methodically study the position of the cards, and thankfully my spatial memory worked to my advantage in this game. The game of *Memory* is one of those games where short-term memory pays off.

Having a strong short-term is not always beneficial, though. Our sins cause shame, and they cause guilt. They cause feelings of worthlessness and regret. Of all people who could have a strong short-term and long-term memory, God would be highest on that list. We know God is omniscient, he is all-knowing. The Psalmist says he can perceive our thoughts from afar. Before a word is on our lips, he knows it completely. We have nowhere to hide from his knowledge, even though we often try.

But God is a God of compassion, love, and forgiveness. He is a God of undeserved grace and mercy. He has every right to condemn us to an eternity of pain and suffering in hell, yet he chose to send his Son into the world as our substitute, to suffer the pain we should suffer, and to die the death we deserve. Because of what Jesus has done for us, the words in our text ring true. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Our God who knows all chooses to forget our wickedness, to cast our sins away since they were paid for in full. We are no longer bound by our regret, and God restores our broken spirits.

Prayer: Merciful Father, we thank you for your love and compassion. We know we deserve your punishment because of our daily sins and struggles of the flesh, but you do not disown us. You bring us back into your presence and make us whole again. Continue to be with us and to bless us in our struggle against our old nature, and make us strong to do your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Removing Stains

Tuesday, November 30th

Isaiah 1:18

I'm not a very big fan of doing laundry, and even more so when there are stains to deal with. I've seen the commercials for products like *Fab* and *OxiAction* stain removers, and have even made use of them. But from experience, I can say that it is almost impossible to completely remove some stains. Our text for today paints a similar picture. Isaiah calls our sins like scarlet and red as crimson. There is no way I would bother to try to treat a white shirt where the entire fabric was basically dyed deep red. I might get a one-square-inch section to somewhat resemble a shade of white again, but I would likely discard the garment. Later in Isaiah, he refers to even our righteous acts as filthy rags. With that reality, what hope is left?

I had the privilege to contribute to the writing of a song about baptism, and I want to share some of the lyrics with you now, as I believe they accurately describe our reaction to our sinful stains. "Shameful I scour my sinful soul; stains will remain nonetheless. But if you say you won't notice the dirt for I'll be dressed in your righteousness, then I'll say: What can stand in the way of my being baptized if all of it is done by you? It's your hand in the water that washes my life and makes it new."

The truth of the matter is we can try and try to scrub away the dirt and the shame from our sins, but if it were up to us, the stains will remain. It is God who covers us in Jesus's righteousness and erases our sins. Our text reminds us, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." What a comfort to know that it does not depend on us, and that our sins have been removed from us as high as the heavens are above the earth, and as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). God doesn't look at us in disgust and discard us, but he restores us and removes our regret.

Prayer: Lord, we know that we are broken and in need of restoration. Thank you for sending your Son to be our substitute. Help us to live our lives renewed in confidence that our sins have been forgiven and that you have covered us in the righteousness of Jesus. In his name we pray, Amen.

No Regrets

Wednesday, December 1st

John 8:11

If you were interviewed and a list of your regrets were published on Facebook for the world to see, what would your list look like? Fighting with your spouse or sibling? Talking badly about your coworkers or classmates? Spending too much time on the iPad, iPhone, Droid and too little time with your spouse? Spending more and saving less instead of spending less and saving more? Imagine for a moment what it must have been like when this woman's secret, shameful, sinful lifestyle was publicized. Can you fathom the fear as she is brought to Jesus? Can you imagine the glares she received as the religious leaders pointed out her illicit behavior? Can you picture her face turning red and her hands covering her face in shame?

It isn't very hard to picture her shame, is it? You've felt that same rush of embarrassment and wishing you could hide away where no one could find you too, haven't you? Your own, "Oh I wish I wouldn't have done that" situations, and "If I could do that over I wouldn't have said that" kind of mistakes too, right? Regret after regret after regret. You know them. If that's not bad enough, your Saviour knows them, all too.

And what did he do with them? He didn't raise an accusing finger but took upon himself all of the accusations. He didn't hide from your sin. He took it upon himself. He didn't walk away from you, but walked to the cross for you. That place where every single one of your regrets was removed. He doesn't condemn you, but was condemned for you. Why? So that you could *"Go now... Go now in the peace and forgiveness he was born to bring. Go now in thankfulness of his life full of no regrets for you. Go now in joyfulness because he gave his life that you would be set free from the guilt of your regrets. Go now and leave your life of sin."*

You may have a list of regrets, but God has removed them because he didn't regret sending his Son for you. That's something he never regrets because he wants you to be with him forever.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for coming into this world to pay for my sin. Fill me with your forgiveness and empower me to leave my life of sin that I may always live for you. Amen.

Forget the Former Things

Thursday, December 2nd

Isaiah 43:18

"Forget about it!" Has someone ever said that to you? Maybe the piano piece you played at the recital wasn't played perfectly like when you practiced at home. You can't stop thinking about that one chord that messed you up. Or the argument you had with your spouse still sits heavily in your mind. Sometimes we dwell on those things that aren't all that significant and someone tells us, *Forget about it*.

But then there are those things we've done that gnaw at our conscience. Our heart races if we think about it too long. And try as we might, the more we think about it the harder it is to forget about it. Maybe it was that impatience that turned to an angry outburst toward our spouse that left the night ruined. Maybe it was that email you fired off or text message you sent in the heat of the moment that has resulted in silence from your relative.

"Forget about it?" Our conscience won't let us. The glare from our spouse or the silence from our friend or the coldness of the air are a constant reminder we did wrong. How can we not dwell on it? Regrets... we all have them. But what is more effective than dwelling on them and lamenting them is to take them to someone who can actually do something about them. In a few weeks you're going to peer again into a manager from the past. You're going to call to mind why he came and what he did. Remember that baby was born not for those who are 'good' or on the 'nice list', but those who lament their past. Those whose guilt lingers and whose conscience continues to convict them. The baby Jesus came so God could intentionally forget your past. Your sins are not recorded. He gave his life so we can move from lingering and lamenting to learning and living. Learn again why he came to dwell on this earth for you. If the God of perfect memory can intentionally forget my sins due to Christ's sacrifice, there is reason to believe I can also – not just by putting them out of my mind – but by replacing the wrongs I've done with Christ and the right he has done for me, in my place.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, when the past haunts me and I dwell on my sins, focus my eyes on your life and death that has forgiven and erased them. Amen.

Preparations!

Friday, December 3rd

Psalm 32:1-2

Advent season means preparation! Christmas is in eighteen days. Will I finish my Christmas to-do list? As much as the world flaunts the joy of Christmas, in reality, this is one of the most stressful times of the year.

Because of that stress, many people, Christians included, search for peace. The Holy Spirit's words through King David in Psalm 32 assist us in our peace. Much of the stress of preparing for Christmas involves seeing family – the brother in law who always gets on my nerves; my parent who constantly criticizes; my child who doesn't seem to care if he comes or doesn't come. The stress also occurs over those we won't see this Christmas – my loved one who passed away, and I never apologized to them! Christmas joy can easily ruin itself over Christmas regrets. "If only I would have held my tongue ..." "I could have stopped this if ..." "I should have spoken up sooner!"

The Holy Spirit reminds us of the blessings that belong to us because we have a God who forgives. We are blessed; joy is ours because of the forgiveness our God offers through Jesus. King David knew a little about forgiveness. He knew the joy of hearing the words "The LORD has taken away your sin!" His transgressions were forgiven. His sins were covered. Why? Because the Lord did not count his sin against him. Forgiveness is not something that originates with us. Forgiveness is not something that originates with the other person. Forgiveness originates and is completed with the LORD. The blood of Jesus, poured out as our guilt offering on the cross, is what paid the full price for every sin, ours included. Do you have Christmas regrets? Take them first to the cross of Jesus. Hear the words that the LORD spoke to David through his pastor, Nathan – "The LORD has taken away your sin." With forgiveness in hand, go into this Christmas season confident and joyful. Celebrate the Saviour who came into the world with you in mind. The baby Jesus who looks up from the manger is looking at you. He entered this sin-filled world with your name carved into his hand. He wants you to be blessed, joyful, and have peace!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I have regrets for things I have done and failed to do. Give me your peace this Christmas, and remind me that forgiveness comes from you. Amen.

The Burden of Sin

Saturday, December 4th

Psalm 32:3-4

Picture yourself as King David. The LORD has blessed you. He placed the kingdom of Israel in your hands. He gave you victory in every battle you fought. He promised to send the Saviour through your family! He gave you trust in him as your Saviour. His grace to you is overwhelming!

But look at what you've done. You seduced another man's wife. You got her pregnant. You killed her husband in battle to cover up your sin. You put all this in the back of your mind and put on your benevolent king face. You comforted the widow by taking her into your home as your wife. All is fine. No one will find out. You can still be the hero.

Or can you? David put on his "normal" face, but things weren't normal. As long as he kept silence about his dirty deeds, they ate away at him. He could still distinguish between right and wrong, but the regret of what he did plagued him. His Spirit-guided conscience was still active, even if it was in the background.

Guilt and regret are two qualities the world does not esteem. It weighs me down. It keeps me from enjoying life. True! David did not enjoy life while he was carrying the burden of what he did. The heavy hand of God's law to convict the heart is a necessary part of our lives. *"Through the law we become conscious of sin."* (Romans 3) All strength in myself has to be dried up. The 'break' must come before the healing can begin.

Sin doesn't go away by trying harder tomorrow. It doesn't get canceled when I do something good. It can only be removed by death. Jesus' cross is the sacrificial death that defeated sin, once and for all. Only there will we find God's heavy hand removed, and strength and joy returning. With the burden removed by Jesus, we are free to serve God and each other, even after the sins that plague us and hurt others. That is good news of great joy for all people, yourself included!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the heavy hand of your law. I don't like hearing that my sins earn me hell, but I need to be broken, so I can be refreshed with Jesus' forgiveness. Break me each day, so that I always treasure your forgiveness and love. Amen.

I'm Sorry!

Sunday, December 5th

Psalm 32:5

"*I am sorry!*" "*It was my fault!*" "*I take the blame!*" Many people choke on those words. There are three important phrases to remember in your life. Say them regularly to those around you. 1. I love you. 2. I am sorry. 3. I forgive you. Keep those phrases in your regular conversations, and you will be blessed.

Why is it so hard for me to say, "I am sorry?" I don't like being wrong. Saying 'sorry' makes me vulnerable. I may not trust that the person will forgive me.

The Bible uses a statement to describe King David that may sound unbelievable after what we read yesterday. The Bible calls David "A man after God's own heart." How can that be? Look what he did! Adultery, lying, deception, murder!!! David was a broken man. But he also trusted his Saviour God. When the prophet called him to confession and said, "You are the man," David immediately, penitently, and humbly replied, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Why was David so ready to confess? He knew who his God was. He knew and trusted that the LORD was *the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.*

Knowing who this Saviour God is, and trusting his qualities is essential in my day-to-day relationship with him. I can willingly lay my sins before Jesus, because I know he will be there each time with the forgiveness he has already placed in my account.

The readiness of my God to forgive not only makes it easier to confess. It also makes me more determined to stay away from those sins that plague me each day. The heart of Jesus to forgive will also lead me to be more willing to forgive others when they sin against me and encourage others to forgive me when I sin against them. That gives me peace and joy, not only as I prepare for Christmas. It gives me peace and joy for eternity!

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for being so willing to forgive. Thank you for sending Jesus to be my sin, and for giving me his righteousness. With Jesus, I have no regrets! Amen.