

Remembering God's Mercies in Affliction

"And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." – Genesis 41:51-52

Summary:

Joseph named his sons Manasseh and Ephraim to preserve the memory of God's dealings with him. Manasseh testified that God had changed his circumstances so completely that his former suffering no longer ruled him; Ephraim declared that God had made him fruitful in the very land of his affliction. Believers should remember past mercies because forgetfulness weakens gratitude and confidence. Affliction need not prevent fruitfulness, for God uses trials to produce righteousness and spiritual growth. Every change, deliverance, and good result must therefore be traced to God, not merely to human instruments or circumstances.

Outline:

1. Remember God's dealings

- Remembering former mercies strengthens faith, gratitude, and confidence in the unchanging God.

2. God can transform our condition

- Manasseh testified that God had removed the power of Joseph's former toil and sorrow.

3. Affliction does not prevent fruitfulness

- Ephraim showed that God can make his people flourish in the very place of their suffering.

4. Seek spiritual fruit above outward success

- Prosperity matters little unless the soul grows in grace and bears the fruits of righteousness.

5. Give God the glory for every mercy

- Faith sees God's hand beyond secondary causes, and humility gives his name all the praise.

Text

Joseph's choice of names was nothing special. In those early times, people often named things, places, and individuals to commemorate events and preserve their memory. After Mizpeh defeated Shen, Samuel erected a stone and named it Ebenezer, meaning, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." When God delivered Abraham, Abraham named the place Jehovah-jireh, meaning, "The Lord will provide." Pharaoh also named Joseph Zaphnath-paaneah, meaning, "Revealer of secrets." However, while others named out of tradition, a godly man did so out of principle.

Joseph followed a usual practice but had a unique reason for it. He named his children "after a godly sort." This shows us that remembering important events is valuable. "God requireth that which is past," and for our spiritual growth, remembering is essential. Things only affect us when they stay in our minds; forgetfulness is a temporary lack of knowledge or belief. Paul mentions the Gospel, saying, "by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you."

The apostle encourages his audience to focus carefully on what they've heard so they won't forget. God urges His people to recall Balak's schemes against them and to remember how the Lord guided them through the wilderness. Let us join Asaph in saying, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will recall the works of the Lord; I will surely remember Your wonders from the past."

Does God's power and wisdom change over time? Is he once mighty and now weak? Is he once wise and now ignorant? Has he always been true, or has he become faithless? Was he once gracious and has he turned unkind? The Bible assures us that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. A lot of our shortcomings, particularly in gratitude and trust, stem from a forgetful or faulty memory.

Secondly, Joseph's choice of the name Manasseh highlights how wonderfully God can transform His people's circumstances. The name Manasseh means "forgetting." Joseph clarified, "God hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." This statement refers to the hardships he faced, including the suffering caused by his brothers, the pain of being taken from his beloved home at a young age, and the agony of slavery and imprisonment.

Joseph did not forget these memories; doing so would contradict his intent in giving the name. Instead, his circumstances changed so profoundly that no signs of his past distress remained in his current state. We often say that in heaven, all our sorrows will be forgotten. This doesn't imply we will forget the hand that supported and saved us, but rather that sorrow and sighing will end, and God will wipe away every tear.

Few people faced trials as Joseph did. After repeated setbacks, each challenge grew harder. Eventually, he was not only freed but promoted. Pharaoh appointed him ruler over Egypt, gave him his ring, dressed him in fine linen, adorned him with a gold chain, and allowed him to ride in the second chariot while the people bowed. His previous humiliation and suffering vanished as if they never occurred. This transformation demonstrated that nothing is too difficult for the Lord.

Thirdly, the suffering of the saints does not prevent their productivity. Ephraim means "fruitful," and Joseph clarified the name: "God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." His dying father later used a vivid image to describe him: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall." Although Egypt was a land of hardship for Joseph, he thrived there more than expected and prospered in all aspects of his life.

This abundance surely encompasses godliness alongside wealth, honor, and children. For a good person, what does it mean to grow in everything else without advancing in grace? How useful is financial success if our souls do not prosper? What benefit are all earthly blessings if we are not also enriched with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ?

Paul prayed that the Philippians would be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which come through Jesus Christ, to bring glory and praise to God. Christian, do you see this world as nothing but a land of suffering? Have you found it to be a valley filled with tears, yet still productive? Your hardships don't have to hinder your growth; instead, they are meant to nurture and enhance it. Although they are painful and not joyful, they still produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness for those who are trained by them.

What have our trials achieved in us? Although it's unfortunate that we need them, it's even more tragic to miss out

on their benefits. Can we honestly say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted"?

Finally, we must recognize God's hand in all our concerns, especially our blessings. Both temporal and spiritual gifts originate from the same source: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Joseph attributed everything to God. If his circumstances improved, it was because God changed them: "God hath made me forget all my toil." If he became fruitful, the source was God: "God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

Faith guides us to God and reveals His power, even when others view only instruments and secondary causes. Humility teaches us to acknowledge, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." Together, faith and humility give evidence of our preparation for a future where "God is all in all."

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 13, Evening), first published in 1854.