

The Fickleness of Memory

2Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 Mark 6: 1-13 Pastor Lentz
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Ever since being a young man these passages have caused me to wonder. The phrase that Jesus used about prophets not being appreciated in their home country had me wondering. What was the psychological device that caused it. God had of course made David popular and I wondered how come that God had not made Jesus more popular or how come that the scripture presents this image. This week I got an answer that feels very satisfying to me. I will share it with you in a few min.

While studying these passages it struck me that one of the messages here is about memory, In Luther's version in German he translates the verse about Jesus home town as that the people had not forgotten him. Other translations say nothing about memory. What an insight into a way to think about this, and then it occurred to me that it was brilliant. The entire message is about memory and emotions. Because emotions change memory. It may be that being emotional doesn't change what you can save on your computer or even your phone. It certainly does when it comes to our memory. In fact, memory is powerfully impacted by emotion in many different ways.

If you contrast the two passages you see that David was wildly popular and Jesus was not. It was because of truths about human emotions that caused this. David was already popular when people who knew him and wanted to be related to him. Jesus on the other hand was not well known, and because people knew him they thought very little about him. Jesus famous words about how that a prophet is not appreciated in his home country only tells half the story. If the prophet becomes famous away from the home town and then

returns he will be enormously appreciated. It has to do with how our mind works. It has to do with emotions. I am reminded of it by seeing pictures of famous people on the sides of buildings in Louisville. The people of Louisville are claiming connection to the famous folks who lived there. It is like that around the world, and has been since Jesus day I suspect.

Emotions change what we see, can see and believe when we see it. Emotions probably even change what we think about what we see. Consider if you were in a very loving and great mood, when you saw the Grand Canyon. You would be elated. You might consider it the most wonderful thing you have ever seen. However if right before seeing the canyon you got bad news from home that totally changed how you saw things. A person might in that situation become irritable and ready to go back home to take care of the bad news.

If you are not convinced of the fragility of memory, let me tell you about an experiment that I heard about recently. It seems that researchers took a group of people who were middle aged and they broke them into two groups that received a brief lecture. The first group was told words like bingo, Florida, retirement, older, etc. The second group was told words that included things like active, energy, exercise, etc. Then the researchers gave both groups a test. The group that was given words that implied older, did less well on the test and they walked slower out of the room, with more obvious distrust of their balance. All it took was for the first group to hear words that implied something that was associated with less memory and they compiled.

Now the good news of this is that we can take seriously what the Bible says to us and trust that it is going to invite us to health, happiness, and spiritual wisdom. In the Bible we can not only trust the messages contained of an overt fashion we can also appreciate the ones that are of an implied fashion. We are told that we are made in the image of

God. When we appreciate that and assume good things about our body and memory we can do better. It may be one of the reasons that when you read the Bible you feel better.

We are told to not trust even ourselves too much in Proverbs. It is simply a truth that trusting our memory too much is not a good idea. Believing that anyone's memory is like a video of an event is simply incorrect. We may experience it like a movie, but like all movies it is edited and an altered film that we see. A friend of mine studied film editing and he said that action movies have a cut about every 1.5 seconds. That is a lot of editing that without knowing that most of us wouldn't even think about it. However, it is because of our normal process because our emotions alter what we see, they edit if you will the process. Your emotions alter what you are perceiving, and even understanding. The first series of edits happen at the time of the experience. The more the experience is remembered the more that it is edited, and altered. The more I understand this the more that it makes sense to me that the Bible invites us to be in a constant state of prayer, or awareness of God. it means that we will be protected and the emotional altering will be in a positive manner instead of a negative one.

Most people know about the famous experiment with a gorilla suit. You know the one where researchers had people busy watching how many times a basketball was passed on a court. Their preoccupation caused a majority of them to not see the man in a gorilla suit walk across the floor. When told about the gorilla many people doubted, and even doubted when they saw the film replayed. Not only does preoccupation alter what a person sees, so too does certainty, or pride. I suspect that many of the people didn't want to believe they could be that wrong.

While fear of dementia grips many people the more that we can avoid the fear the better. Most of the memory loss that most people have is attributable to things like fear, and normal forgetfulness associated with how the brain works. Even for people who are impacted by dementia if they too appreciate that God can even use that condition to bring about spiritual growth and blessings for them and others.

I checked recently about memory and aging. There are a couple of things that do slip. As we get older we are less able to discern when someone is conning us. Perhaps it is because we have more experience with so many odd things occurring that we are not as incredulous when someone is actually conning us.

However the good side is that as we get older we are wiser and less inhibited. We are much more willing to try new things or do things that might have made us look foolish. Grandparents can be made to look really foolish by grandchildren who are not smiling. Well that isn't true. We make our own selves look foolish when we make those faces, and do those silly things that get our grandchildren and great grand children to smile.

We are encouraged by the Bible to accept that the way we age is natural normal and what God designed. So when it takes us a little longer to remember a name, or some other thing it is because we also have a lot more files to look through to pull it up. When we treat that as normal we can appreciate ourselves as wonderfully made by God. Now the opposite is also true, and closer to what these two passages suggest. If a person is afraid, then they are much less likely to remember. Fear, anxiety, and depression slow down our use of memory. It however is a temporary situation.

Emotion makes our memory more state dependent. If you learned something in an excited emotional state, and tried to remember it in an

anxious state, you might not remember it very well. However, when you again were in an excited state you would remember probably just fine. That is simply a truth of memory no matter what age a person is. So if a person study's with a particular emotion and then takes a test while in an entirely different emotion they won't do as well as they could.

Ok, now there is one other way that as we age our memory is impacted. Generally things that are connected to a particular circumstance that is rare in our life we tend to not remember as well as when we were young. It is probably a good thing because by the time we get older there are a lot of things that are just not that necessary to remember. It is actually a disorder to have to remember everything. Imagine how unpleasant it would be to have to remember all the experience of all those traffic jams, of office waits.

On the flip side of that are things that we do often. We remember those things very well. So consider that when we worship that we are more able to remember other times when we felt close to God. The more that we do it the easier it is to remember doing it. Many of us have practices of reading the Bible, and or bible studies frequently and we get to find God speaking to us individually to us on many occasions through what we read, study, and hear at bible studies. It brings us a feeling of being close to God. It gives us a feeling of God being close to us. It also helps us with being more able to remember those times easily.

Another aspect of this passage that we can appreciate is that the people wanted to be close to David, because they wanted to associate with his popularity and his fame. When we spend time with God we naturally want to be close to him because it feels so good. it is a reminder of how much that God loves us and of how much that we can receive from God and especially what we can pass on.

Part of what jumps out at me is that our emotion of jealousy is what got in the way of the people who knew Jesus when he was a young boy. They were less likely to want to see someone who they knew as a child to receive acclaim from them. The implication is that it would somehow take away from their status. Jealousy is always about someone else's prosperity, luck, ability or fame somehow taking away from us. It is a symptom of a person's not recognizing how God is with them. The more that you allow yourself to recognize how God is already with you, then there is also no need to be jealous of anyone else.

Consider that if Jesus had become famous before going back home, then people would have been clamoring to be remembered by him. They would have been happy to know him. Because knowing him when he was already famous enhanced your status as well.

I view jealousy as a sign that we are not recognizing how God is already blessing us. Yes, we may not all be as frustrated as Tiger is with his golf game, but if you focus upon others and you too could be. Or we could be as happy as we hope to be whether we can golf, swim, run, sing, work, etc as well as we would like to. Your ability to like what you are able to do is about your spending time intentionally improving. That is actually how that joy comes. It requires us to have something that we are able to improve at that we keep getting better at. It is one reason learning brings such joy.

One of the things that seems to be a message from these passages is that respecting how wonderfully we are made helps us to avoid jealousy, and helps us to remember things better. Besides it makes it easier to be nice to ourselves and others when we are noticing how we are just the way that God designed us to be instead of the way that we might think we should be. Amen