THANKS FOR THE MEMORY
Psalm 105:1-5

My mother had two heroes in the entertainment world. The first was John Wayne. She thought the Duke was the bomb in every way. In spite of our lack of funds, in spite of the fact it was a 45-minute drive from Branson, my mother actually took us to Springfield, Missouri, to see The War Wagon, starring John Wayne and Kirk Douglas, in one of the big theaters there—the only time we ever went to Springfield for a movie. If John Wayne was in it she wanted to see it. She loved John Wayne.

Her second entertainment hero was Bob Hope. She watched all those road movies he made with Bing Crosby every time they were on television, and when one of his periodic specials was on, you can be sure she’d have us in front of the TV to watch it—especially when it was one of those shows he did for the troops in Viet Nam. She loved Bob Hope. Maybe that’s why I love him too. And Bob Hope had a theme song, you know.

As we continue our sermon series, Summer Songs, I invite you to open your Bible to Psalm 105:1-5. Each Sunday in the series we’re unpacking a psalm from Israel’s hymnbook, stealing the title of a song from our culture, and learning how to sing the Christ-life in our day. Bob Hope’s theme song is our song for today. Some of you, especially our younger folks, probably don’t even know Bob Hope, let alone his theme song. Others of you will know it very well. Let the music begin ...

Thanks for the Memory. That seems like an appropriate song on Memorial Weekend. Isn’t this a weekend in which we spend time remembering? We remember our armed forces men and women who died fighting our country’s wars. We remember our family dead as we visit cemeteries, place flowers, and reminisce about their lives. Thanks for the memory.

Memories are precious. When I was a young man, I didn’t appreciate the value of memories. I remember spending some time now and then with Dayna’s grandparents when we were young whippersnappers in the early years of our marriage. I loved her grandparents but—geez-Louise—our visits with them pretty much did me in. Her grandpa would be in one chair; I’d be in another—their silver Christmas tree shimmering a rainbow of color from a four-colored, plastic, spinning back-lit wheel. Their wood stove cranking up the
heat and turning their small farmhouse into an oven. And in the midst of this, her grandpa insisted on giving me a monotone monologue of his entire life-history, telling story upon story as I fought to keep my head upright and my eyelids open. As a young man, I endured times like that. As an older man, I wish I’d have paid more attention.

Memories matter. I love telling my grandkids stories from my life and from my parents’ lives. And I notice that my memory is not what it used to be, and that bothers me. I used to could remember names really well—that’s harder for me now. I used to could pull things from my memory in a snap—nowadays it takes that little guy working the file cabinet in my mind sometimes hours to find the right file. And then he may dump it on me when I’m in the middle of something else. Frustrating. As we age, we worry a little when we don’t remember so well. We feel akin to Gary Larson’s Far Side cartoon captioned “Superman in his later years.” An old Superman, who forgot to take off his Clark Kent hat, is standing in the window, cape on, ready to fly to the rescue, but turns to his wife, and says, “Dang! … Now where was I going?” Memories are precious.

That was certainly not lost on the psalmists. There are several psalms that could bear the superscription, “Thanks for the memory.” One of those is our text this morning. Hear the word of the Lord … (read the text).

Listen again to v. 5: “Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has pronounced.” And that’s pretty much what the psalmist does for the next 40 verses. Of course, all he has to go on is Old Testament history. Living on the backside of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we have both testaments to draw from. So on this Memorial Weekend, let’s remember and give thanks.

I

Remember the wonders God has done.

Every morning when you open your bedroom curtain or step outside, remember what God has done in creation. Remember that creation is here and you are here because God determines it to be. God spoke creation into existence. “Let there be light,” said God, “and there was light. Let there be sun and moon … let the land and the waters separate … let birds fill the sky, fish fill
the sea, and crawling creatures of every kind fill the earth." And they did. God spoke these things into existence—didn't even get His hands dirty. But when it came to creating humankind, God did get His hands dirty, scooping up a pile of dirt, molding it into the shape of a man, and breathing into him the breath of life. That's intimate stuff right there. No wonder God considers you and me the crown of creation, the only part of creation shaped in God’s very own image.

Creation is a wonder. Just open your eyes to the world around you. The canopy of sky and clouds and twinkling stars. Majestic pines shooting up to the heavens. Powerful oaks whose limbs spread out in all directions in shade and shelter. Birds of every color and size: some chirp, some squawk, some chatter, and some sing like an angel. Creatures of every kind—earth burrowers, tree climbers, water lovers, land lovers, all doing, without thinking two things about it, the things God made them to do in His world. Open your eyes to the world around you and you see the wonders that God has done.

And then look in a mirror and see yet another wonder. We human beings come in so many shapes and sizes—short, tall, and in between. Elephant broad, toothpick skinny, fat, lean, and cuddly. Blue eyes, green eyes, brown eyes, black. Numerous shades of blond hair, brunette hair, red hair, black hair, gray hair, and dyed hair, of various texture and curl. Regular people, Down’s people, spina bifida people, cerebral palsy people—God doesn’t make accidents. A brain that functions better than a computer because the human brain invented the computer. And on top of all that, God makes everyone of us unique. No one in history, no one on the planet, is exactly like you because you have DNA that is all your own. You are an original with God’s fingerprints all over you. And you are that way because God made you that way, well, except for the dyed hair. You, my friend, are a wonder.

Remember the wonders of God. And remember that God doesn’t just form a person, the psalmist reminds us that He forms a nation, choosing, for reasons known only to himself, little, no account Israel to be His people. Beginning with a covenant that God initiated with Abraham, forming a nation under God’s laws given through Moses, establishing a nation under kings like David and Hezekiah and Josiah, enduring the nation’s failures and their sins, disciplining them, judging them, refining them, keeping them, so that a child named Jesus could be born from them and become the Savior of the world. Israel is a wonder. They came out of nowhere to become a nation that has existed, whether gathered or scattered, since their inception. Has God put up
with any nation so long as He has put up with Israel? Israel is a wonder. Our Savior Jesus Christ the Lord came through Israel. It’s a great wonder all right: the one true God would make us, knowing full well we’d spit in His eye, launch full-scale rebellion against Him and His ways, and yet He’d set in place a plan and a nation and a Savior that could lead to our salvation? The hymnist got it right when he asks the profound question, “What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul.”

Remember the wonders of God and give thanks.

II

Remember the miracles of God.

Our God is no pip-squeak, no incompetent hand-wringer who would like to do more than He is able to do. Our God created nature. When He chooses to intervene and buck the natural laws He put in place, He can do it anytime He wants, and He can do it with one hand tied behind His back. God is the God of mighty acts, the God of miracles.

The psalmist recalls Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, the plundering of Egypt’s wealth, the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night that protected Israel, the quail and the manna God gave to feed Israel, and even the water God wrung out from a rock in the middle of a desert to quench their thirst. God worked plenty of miracles in the Old Testament. There’s the splitting of the Red Sea and the Jordan River to allow Israel safe passage out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, there’s the battle of Jericho when the walls came tumbling down at the sound of shout and trumpet, there’s Elijah’s raising the widow’s son, there’s the defeat of thousands of brutal, chest-beating, smack-talking Assyrians at the hand of the angel of God outside Jerusalem’s gate. And that just gets us started. Remember the miracles of God.

And what about the New Testament and the miracles of Jesus: water into wine (yes, I know, we Baptists would have preferred it the other way around but it was water into wine), walking on water, calming a storm, multiplying a sack lunch into a feast for thousands, casting out demons, healing every sickness known to people in that day, raising the dead—even Lazarus who had been four-days dead and buried. Oh, the miracles of Jesus! But don’t just remember the miracles of Jesus.
Remember the miracle of Jesus. You don’t see virgin conceptions every day, you know. How God impregnated the virgin Mary by the shadowing of the Holy Spirit is beyond me, and beyond science. And yet it’s this that demonstrates that Jesus is truly the God-Man, fully God and fully man at the same time. As John put it, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us, and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:1, 14). As Paul put it, “For in Christ, the Godhead dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). Jesus is a miracle, I tell you.

And how Jesus, though with the capacity to sin, walked this earth, faced every temptation you and I face yet never sinned is nothing short of a miracle either.

And what about the cross? Is it not a miracle that Jesus restrained himself from dropping hailstones or slapping leprosy on the heads of those who abandoned Him and mocked Him and drove spikes into His hands and feet? And if that’s not miracle enough, what about the mystical transaction of the cross in which God can mysteriously take our sin and put it on Jesus, and take Jesus’ righteousness and put it on us, so that our sins may be forgiven and atoned for—so that we might be saved from our sins and given eternal life? Jesus even gave us a little ritual meal called the Lord’s Supper to share together so we’d be sure to remember what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Yet there’s more: though Jesus was as dead as the nails that pinned him to the cross when they took His body down and buried Him, on the third day Jesus rose from the dead! The Jews could charge Him, the Romans could kill Him, death could take Him, but not even death could have Him for long. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. Forty days later He ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, interceding for us in our troubled lives and preparing a place for us so that when He comes again, we will live forever with Him in heaven. Don’t just remember the miracles of Jesus; remember the miracle of Jesus.

And what about the miracles God has done in your life? Has He saved you from your sin? That’s a miracle. Has He pulled you out of the wringer at the last second, made a way for you when there was no way, spun a tragedy in your life into a beautiful thing? All of that—a hint of the miraculous.
Listen to the psalmist sing the song. Remember the miracles of God, and give thanks.

III

Remember the judgments of God.

The psalmist remembers the plagues God sent on Egypt. He recounts the bloody waters, the frogs, the flies, the hail, the locusts, and the last and worst plague of all: the death of the firstborn in Egypt. It’s important to remember that God is no softie, no sentimental grandpa in the sky, no empathetic therapist in the clouds, no wink-and-smile-at-sin God. God is holy and righteous altogether. He hates sin. He hates evil. He hates injustice and oppression and tyranny. And sooner or later, God brings down judgment on evil and on those who perpetrated it.

Israel knew this. They’d seen the judgments of God at Sodom. They’d seen God judge Philistia when Samson brought the palace down on Philistia’s leaders. They’d seen God judge Israel’s enemies. And they’d seen God judge Israel itself when they turned their back on God, forgot His covenant, spurned His love, broke His laws, and kissed up to every idol their hands could make. They’d seen God’s judgments. They’d tasted God’s judgments. And they came to understand that God is not to be trifled with, mocked, or scorned. God is God and we are not. And when He wants to lower the boom on anybody and any nation, no army, no navy, no nothing can stop Him. It’s a healthy thing to remember the judgments of God.

And what do we see at the end of the New Testament? We see that there will be judgment—that all of us will give an accounting of our lives before God. Those who didn’t seek God or honor God or believe in God will be sent to hell. They wanted a godless life; they get a godless eternity. Those who believed God, who put their trust in Christ, won’t have to worry about hell because Jesus endured our hell on the cross. But we will still give an account for how we lived our lives—our works will be tested. Essentially: what did you do with what God gave you? And we will receive rewards for the works that survive the testing. The Bible is fuzzy about the details of such things, but it’s clear about this: you and I will give an account of our lives to God. Don’t forget that.
And don’t forget that God will also render **final judgment** on the earth and on His enemies, crushing evil once and for all like a spider under a hobnail boot. We’re not talking about evil *restrained*; we’re talking about evil *destroyed* ... and destroyed completely and forever. It won’t find a single nook or cranny to hide in when God sets up the eternal order for His people in the new heaven and new earth.

So the earth will face judgment. God’s enemies will face judgment. You and I will face judgment. But we **don’t need to fear it** because of the judgment God rendered in the cross and resurrection of Jesus: God judging sin, God defeating death, God destroying the works of the devil. He did it right there in Christ. So when we put our trust in Christ, we don’t have to be slave to such things any longer. And while it’s wise to remember and respect the judgments of God, we don’t need to fear His judgment because our lives are hidden with Christ in God—and because even His judgment is tempered by His love.

Thanks for the Memory. That’s the psalmist’s song in 105. Remember the *wonders* of God, the *miracles* of God, and the *judgments* of God, and give thanks for these memories.

**IV**

**But give thanks for another memory too:**
the good news that God remembers **us**.

Our psalmist hints at this truth in a couple of places in 105 when he sings that God remembers His covenant and His promises to Abraham (vv. 8 and 42). God remembers us. You remember when God was speaking with Moses through the burning bush? God identified himself saying, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” not “Abraham, Isaac, and what’s-his-name” as if God’s as iffy on names and faces as we are, as if God’s memory is as short and jumbled as ours. God remembers us. He remembers our names. He remembers our lives.

And this is a great hope for us all. In one of David’s psalms, David prays, “Remember not the sins of my youth, and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord” (25:7). God remembers us according to His love. We’ve all had relationships that include a certain amount of lousy memories, but I find that as I reflect on my relationships across the years, it’s mostly the good memories that stand out. That’s the way
it is with God when He remembers us. He remembers us according to His love. It’s not so much that He forgets our sins as if He’s got memory issues; it’s that He chooses not to remember our sins—and chooses instead to remember us according to His love.

We see evidence of that in Jesus. Right in the thick of His suffering death on the cross, one of the criminals crucified at His side said with repentant heart, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And do you remember Jesus’ response? He didn’t say, “Sure, I’ll remember you. I’ll remember the crimes that got you put in jail and hung on a cross. I’ll remember your rebellious ways, your stupid sins, and your lack of belief until the last hours of your life. Oh yeah, I’ll remember you, all right.” That’s not what Jesus said. Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Or to put it another way, “According to my love, I will remember you today and I’ll remember you forever.” So while you’re remembering God, give thanks that God remembers you—in His good love. Thanks, God, for the memory.

V

Earlier in the service you heard Bob Hope and Shirley Ross sing a clip from Thanks for the Memory. The song came from the 1938 film, The Big Broadcast of 1938. Did you know this song won the Academy Award that year for Best Original Song? In the film, Hope and Ross play a married couple who have come to the brink of divorce. Near the end of the film, they poignantly sing this song recalling the ups and downs of their relationship. And they are so moved by the memories for which they’re thankful that they decide to stick together after all.

Memories are precious. Memories are powerful. So as you thumb through the memories of your life, remember God’s wonders, God’s miracles, and God’s judgments in history and in your life. But best of all, be swept up in the glad good news that, according to His love, God remembers you. And give Him thanks.

Preached: May 25, 2013
First Baptist Church, Hot Springs, AR
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