

Collective Memory

Then Moses said to the people, "Remember this day when you came out of Egypt, out of the place of slavery, for the Lord brought you out of here by the strength of [His] hand... - Exodus 13:3 HCSB

A characteristic of the wise is that they not only survive life lessons, but they recall what was learned and apply that knowledge to future challenges.¹ Perhaps that is why Jesus became so frustrated with the crowd that asked for another miracle.² Right after He fed four thousand men, plus all their women and children with seven loaves and a few small fish³, they asked for a miraculous sign to prove His authority! How big a miracle did they need?

Apparently this is a common problem because collective amnesia struck the people of Israel on a regular basis. God delivered them from Egypt and a few days later they whined that He wasn't taking care of them. God provided manna and shortly they complained that they missed onions and meat!

So Moses set up the Passover.⁴ In this ritual, an opportunity was provided to recall Yahweh Yireh's care for His people. For seven days in the month of Abib⁵ they were to eat unleavened bread. Nothing leaven was to be found among them and all yeast was to be removed from their territory. On the seventh day they got to party.

Obviously this would be considered strange behavior by many, and when their children asked why these things were done, the parents had the chance to explain to the next generation what wonderful things Abhir had done for them.⁶

One Passover night the Son of God added a little tweak to the festival. He commanded that whenever we performed this ritual we should keep in mind His sacrifice on our behalf.⁷ So as we celebrate the Lord's Supper we remember, not only His sacrifice on the cross, but His ongoing love affair with humans ranging all the way back to the Exodus.

Truly free men remember the cost of their freedom and in remembering they are freed. In remembering God's history with our people, we are liberated from our deceptive self-reliance. Remembering allows us to become a link in a chain that has extended for millennia.

As we eat the matza we celebrate Haman's defeat and Esther's victory; Israel's Exodus and the Pharaoh's fall; Nehemiah's wall and Sanballat's discomfiture. As we raise the cup, we praise God because of His triumph over death by the shedding of His precious blood.

Someday in the future, a family will gather round a Passover / Communion table and a small child will ask, "Why do we do this?" What will that next generation have to remember and celebrate in your life?

¹ Proverbs 4:5-12; 10:14; 14:18; 15:2

² Matthew 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-13

³ Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10

⁴ Deuteronomy 16:1-8

⁵ Around March but some years running into April. Personally I believe this answers the question of "for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup" (1 Corinthians 11:26)

⁶ Exodus 13:4-16

⁷ Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20