

God Remembers His People

Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery, unaware they were preparing the way for their own. Warned of an impending famine through Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph rose to prominence with a plan to store and ration Egypt's harvests. We read about this in Genesis 41. That famine brought the sons of Israel to Egypt for bread. After Joseph's death, they were reduced to slavery. The Egyptians "made their lives bitter with hard service... In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves," (Exodus 1:14).

This historical event also typifies the entire human experience. The pursuit of bread makes life bitter. Uncertainty about tomorrow leads to anxiety. We are held in bondage throughout our life by the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). This fear of death is not an obsession with various medical maladies, or fears surrounding catastrophic events. The fear of death that grips humanity is recognition that everything we have and experience is transitory. Bones break. Hearing fades. Vehicles lose their new-car smell - and then get dented and scratched. Try as we might to retain our earthly treasures, we experience what Jesus says of them: "Moth and rust destroy and... thieves break in and steal," (Matthew 6:19). That is the fear of death: slavery to things that perish, making our "lives bitter with hard service." It is tempting to cry out with the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3). Comfort comes in the memory of God.

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel - and God knew. (Exodus 2:23-25)

Mark well the actions of God when Israel cried out for help. God heard, God remembered, God saw, and God knew. When God remembers, it is not the sudden recollection of something long forgotten. Maybe we make long lists of tasks we must do, tasks we know we should do, ideas we have, and names and events we want to remember. Without the lists, we may forget. But God does not forget as you and I do. In our fear that God has forgotten, we imagine we are all alone, that because nothing has happened, God has abandoned us, He does not care, or He is angry with us. But when the Bible speaks of God's memory, the Holy Spirit is comforting us. God's remembering is His promise to us that He will act in just the right way at just the right time. In the time of famine, in the bitterness of hard service, and in the fear of death, this word for Israel is also for us. God hears. God remembers. God sees. And God knows.