Remember the Promise

**Intro**

I like that quote. “We can't know what may happen in the future. What we think is good may not be good, and what we think is bad may not be bad, because it's hard to make sense of things when you're guessing what may happen.” Hindsight is 20/20; when you look back, things make more sense. And that's what this sermon series has been all about.

CapCity has a new Lead Pastor for the first time in 30 years, and we all want to know what the future looks like. We want to know what that looks like for ourselves. We want to know what that looks like for our families. And we want even want to know what the future holds for this church. But the best way to know what God's going to do in the future is to look backwards at what He's already done. Looking backwards and remembering can be life changing.

It reminds me of the Alamo. I’m from Texas, and here’s a little Texas history. There was a small Catholic mission that was in San Antonio that became the site of a battle. Texas was trying to fight for their independence, and they came up against the Mexican forces, led by General Santa Anna. One of the more memorable battles took place at that little mission in San Antonio known as the Alamo.

The Texans were greatly outnumbered. The Mexican forces were significant, and the Alamo was so very small. Those inside sent word for reinforcements, but the reinforcements would not make it in time. They could have backed down, they could have surrendered, they could have quit … but they refused. And every last fighter in the Alamo died. That includes famous frontiersman Davy Crockett and great Texans like Jim Bowie and William Travis. But, that loss also became an incredible motivator for the Texans in their pursuit of freedom. In fact, a rally cry was born in the place of that great loss – “Remember the Alamo!"

The very next conflict was the Battle of San Jacinto, where the Mexican forces were beaten behind that rally cry and Texas gained it’s independence. And, today, every good Texan, when they leave the house, they remember their keys, their phone, their wallet … and they remember the Alamo. Because a Texan always remembers the Alamo.

Remembering can be future-changing … and so can forgetting.

Last week, we talked about rocks and rock memorials; we called them Ebenezers. It's from Joshua chapter 4, when the Israelites build a rock monument to remember God leading them into the Promised Land as they crossed through the miraculously parted Jordan River. But it’s especially important to recognize that this generation that built rock reminders came after a generation that forgot. They forgot God very quickly. And it leads to God punishing an entire generation. God sentences them to wandering around in the desert for 40 years.

Joshua, the new leader of Israel, doesn't want a replay. He had been young, but he could remember the parted Red Sea, and he could remember the nations failure of forgetting. He didn't want it to happen again. So, he builds a monument, a rock monument, under God's advisement. He built a … memory inducer.

I showed you last week pictures of the camp in New Mexico that holds special significance to me. I lived with my grandmother one summer while working at that camp. My grandmother has since passed, and there is a memorial honoring her at that camp. She died, slowly, from Alzheimer's. It's a painful disease for the person who has the disease, and it's also an incredibly painful disease for those who watch their loved one slowly disappear. The last couple years of her life, she lost the ability to speak clearly; she didn't recognize her children when they would visit. She became a shell of who she once was because she lost the ability to … remember.

In our first message in this series, I said this: “Bad things happen when people forget.” It's bad when people forget, and it's why I encourage you to go build a rock pile. You need a rock pile to remember the victories and for the confidence to expect your next victory. Because here's the thing: hard times keep coming, don't they? Life is hard, and it doesn't relent; it doesn't quit.

There's always more hard things in front of you; there's always harder times that are yet to come. That doesn't mean that there aren't blessings, it doesn't mean there aren't good times to come. But life is hard. Things happen that we don't want to happen; things work against us in ways that we hope that they wouldn't work against us. There are always more rivers to cross.

So, sometimes, simply remembering the past victories doesn't feel like it’s enough. Sometimes it feels like you need something more. Sometimes you need to know what victory to expect in the future. Which is hard. Because sometimes God's victories aren't easy to identify, kind of like that Chinese farmer story. Sometimes the victories don't happen or show up when you want them to. Sometimes you need something more to remember, and that's when we need to remember the promise.

If you go back to Joshua's rock pile, it was as much about the victory of crossing the Jordan as it was a celebration of God fulfilling His promise to His people. Remember, the Israelites left Egypt with this grand promise, a land that was promised to them. And when they pulled those rocks from the Jordan as they walked into the Promised Land, it was a victory. Crossing the river by itself was a victory. It was a culmination of 40 years wandering in the desert; it was finality, it was over, it was done. There was a whole lot of stuff to celebrate in that moment, but those rocks represented even more.

It wasn't just about the victory, it wasn't just about that moment. It was about a promise that was made to these people a generation before. Those rocks serve as a reminder that God made a promise, and He kept His word. God has made promises to us too.

**Transition**

Promises are kind of a tricky thing. Promises aren’t anything special by themselves. They become special when they become fulfilled. You’ve been on the receiving end, or you’ve seen the receiving end of promises fulfilled – think of a marriage and vows. You’ve also been on the receiving end, or you’ve seen someone else on the receiving end of unfulfilled promises – think of a marriage and vows. A promise becomes special when it's honored. If you string enough honored promises together, trust gets built.

Some people trust God's promises; they have a history with God and the ways in which He has fulfilled His promises to them. Some people refuse to trust anybody or anything, including God. They've had too many promises not fulfilled, they've been lied to. Because trust is not built off of my ability to believe, but off of the promiser's ability to do what they said they would do.

So, here's the really big idea that you're going to hang on to today: Jesus keeps His word. Which is a really, really big deal in a world where things don't always work out the way that we want. In a world where life is hard and things happen that we can't control … when wounds happen, when loss happens, when pain takes place … we need to know that a guy named Jesus keeps His word. If you're looking for strength and motivation to make it through this world, then you've got to remember the promises He makes.

And, just like any other relationship, the reason we can believe Jesus is because of the promises he’s already fulfilled. The best way to know what God will do in the future is to look back and see what He has already done.

**Jesus’ Past Promises**

Jesus made a lot of promises. Here are a few. You can go to John 14. He says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Jesus promises His followers will have peace, and it seems like He fulfills this in several different ways.

Sometimes Jesus Followers will talk about a peace that passes understanding. We didn’t come up with that phrase, it’s straight from the New Testament. But, sometimes, we have a peace that passes understanding. It's a peace that we don't create for ourselves. It’s not something we can even control. There have been times in my life when things have happened that seemed incredibly overwhelming, and yet, for some reason that I can't fully explain, I still had a sense of calm and peace. It's an unexplainable peace; sometimes Jesus followers experience that. And there's no other explanation for why they feel peace in that moment. It seems to be something that comes from the work of the Holy Spirit.

Which was another promise made by Jesus. Same book and chapter. Jesus promises, "I'm going to ask the Father, and He's going to give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever." He calls him the Spirit of Truth. He says, "The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

Jesus promises us that He isn't going to leave us stranded. We aren't alone. He's with us. In fact, a couple chapters later, Jesus tells us that it's better for him to leave so the Spirit, the Counselor, can come and be with us. Which is wild. It's wild to think that somehow we're better off without Jesus standing right here with us and being with us. His Spirit living in us is superior and better. It's crazy.

And it's been fulfilled so many different times. It was fulfilled in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit comes down on the disciples as they're praying. It's fulfilled over and over again in personal stories all throughout the New Testament. It was, maybe, even fulfilled in your life. If you've come to faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit was moving and active in your life helping lead you to that point. That's what 1st Corinthians 12 says.

And if you've been baptized, that means that the Holy Spirit has moved into you permanently. He lives in you. Baptism is bigger than just an outward act in the salvation process. It’s when the Holy Spirit goes from just an influencer in your life to a full-time counselor, full-time leader in your life. He moves in and resides with you.

In John 16 Jesus makes another promise: "In this world you will have troubles,” which is an interesting one. In the previous chapter he says, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." Everyone in life has troubles; everyone in life goes through hard things. That's not a promise; that's just a statement of fact. But it is especially true of Jesus followers. Because if Jesus is our leader, and if Jesus, our leader, was persecuted even to the point of death, then it stands to reason that His followers are going to face a similar reality. It's reasonable to assume that the world won't like us any more than it liked Him.

And that truth has been fulfilled just as Jesus said it would in every generation to this day. Right now, you may feel like being a Jesus follower is really hard. Our culture seems to fight against so many of the foundational truths that we believe. There's other places in the world that are facing difficulty on much different level. The Bible is banned or at least severely restricted in 52 countries around the world right now. And while, technically, you can't find any country in the world where being a Christian is illegal, there are many places where being a Christian is not acceptable or allowed. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."

But it’s been every generation. Even with the disciples Jesus was talking to. Jesus had 12 disciples. One of them, Judas, hangs himself in guilt after turning on Jesus. Of the other 11 disciples, 10 of them die as martyrs. The exception is a guy named John, close follower of Jesus, who isn't executed but he is exiled to an island until his death. Jesus promises that following Him will be hard. Life is already hard, but it will be a little extra hard.

Which brings us to another promise that I think is, by far, the most important promise. It first shows up in John 2:19. It says, “Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I'm going to raise it again in three days. The temple that He was speaking of was His body. And after He was raised from the dead, His disciples what He had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.” These words happened early in the gospel message; this is something that Jesus started preaching right off the bat. But it's not just this one time. He talked about this all the time. Towards the end of his ministry, Matthew 16, it says, “From that time on, Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, He must suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of law, and that He must be killed and then on the third day be raised to life.”

Jesus promised early on and then He repeatedly told His disciples that He was going to suffer, He was going to die, and then He was going to raise back to life. These were not just guesses or hypotheses; these were promises. And the disciples didn't believe it. Or maybe you could say that it didn't make sense to them. Maybe they thought it was some sort of metaphor or symbolism that they were trying to understand. They didn't expect it to happen. And even after He suffered, even after He's died exactly in the way that He had promised, they still don't expect a resurrection. When Jesus comes back to life, lying in a tomb, there was no welcoming party. His friends were not there waiting for the party to start. They weren’t sitting there staring at his lifeless body, waiting for something to happen.

But it happened, exactly as he said. And it changed all of history, and it changed all of eternity.

This is the foundational promise, made by Jesus, that changes everything for us. This promise that Jesus makes is why we believe we can trust Him in all the other things. Because … there are other promises that He's made that haven't been fulfilled.

**Transition**

That's right. Not everything that Jesus promised has been fulfilled. Jesus made some promises that are still … waiting to be fulfilled, somewhere off into the future. But that doesn't mean that they don't have value for us in this moment. Remember that big idea earlier: Jesus keeps his word. We know it, because we can look back and see how he has fulfilled his promises. And that gives us hope while we wait for the rest of his promises to be fulfilled.

I think the things that Jesus promises that have not yet been fulfilled, that are still far off in the future, are the things that we should actually be clinging to tightly. Because he has proven faithful in the past, because we can trust him, his promises that haven't yet been fulfilled are the promises that I can focus on that get me through particularly hard moments in my life. They become the promises that we can cling to.

**Promises Yet Fulfilled**

Promises like this. Go back to John 14 and all of things that He promises. He also said this to His disciples, and to us as His followers: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and I'm going to take you to be with me so you may also be where I am." But Jesus hasn’t come back. Jesus went off to heaven, and He hasn't come back yet. This is one of those promises that has not yet been fulfilled.

Which means that as long as the world keeps turning, as long as the sun keeps rising and keeps setting, then it means that there is going to be pain, and there's going to be anguish. There's going to be hurt that exists in this world because we live in a broken world. And you have shards of brokenness throughout your life; I know that you feel this in some way.

You’ve felt it in the loss of a loved one. Maybe you felt it in the consequences of your own sin or an addiction. Maybe you felt the brokenness of this world in the pain of a lost relationship. Maybe it's in the pressure of your finances or expectations. It’s like you have these little open wounds in your soul, little cuts all over you, proving the brokenness of the world that we live in. And it can sting. It can be overwhelming.

Do you know what you need? When you're feeling overwhelmed, and when it feels like life is hard, and it feels like you can't understand why things are happening the way that they are … when life really seems to press in on you on all sides, you know what you need in a moment like that? Remembering Jesus is nice. Remembering your forgiveness is cool. Even remembering the victories in the past are something, but there’s no guarantee about your next victory. Our rock piles don’t feel real relevant when you’re in the middle of brokenness. It's a cool reminder, and I believe in God, and I believe that He wants to do something, but how do I know that there's going to be victory in the future like there was in my past? How can we know? Do you know what you need in a moment like that?

You need to remember the promise. You need to remember that this life isn't all that there is. You need to remember that there are better days ahead, one way or another. You need to remember that Jesus has a plan. As wild and chaotic as the world seems to be around us, it is not catching God off guard. He is steady and consistent.

In fact, one of the promises I think about in moments like this is in Revelation. Now, Revelation is a highly contentious book. There are so many different perspectives on Revelation. It's typically a book that a lot of people are very curious about. A lot of people want to treat Revelation like it's some sort of a puzzle to be solved. And that makes sense, it is prophetic. It has imagery and metaphor and symbolism, and people try to figure out what it all means. I don't look at Revelation like that.

Revelation to me is not a puzzle to be solved; it is a devotional to be read when I hurt. That's what Revelation is: a devotional for hurting people. When John receives his vision from Jesus, the church is hurting. They are intimidated and scared. Many of them are giving up on Jesus because life is getting too hard. It doesn’t make sense that Jesus would give John a puzzled vision for our church to decipher, while his church was suffering. What’s more likely is that Jesus gave John a vision for hurting people. And hurting people, ever since, have found comfort in those words in such a way that it seems as if it was all written specifically for them.

Because here's the reality: you can't know with absolute certainty what will happen in the future. Revelation doesn't give any specific answers to the questions we want to ask. It's too metaphorical … it's too symbolic for us to be able to cleanly interpret in any sort of a literal way. But … it offers a powerful reminder for hurting people that keeps bring Jesus Followers comfort.

I could walk you through example after example throughout this entire book of what that looks like but let me just fly through — literally fly through — four chapters at the end of the book.

In chapter 17, John (the writer of Revelation) receives a vision, from God, of a prostitute riding on the back of a beast. It’s weird. It's very strange. But we know that she represents false religion, and she's riding on the back of pagan governments. God creates division between them and pits them against each other, and they implode upon themselves. It feels like the false religions and pagan governments around us are running the show. But, against false religions and pagan governments, **GOD WINS**. That’s comforting.

In the following chapter, we get an image of a pagan culture, Babylon, and it bites the dust. It’s finished. Which is a simple reminder to us to not give up. When you live in a culture where you feel outnumbered and it feels like everybody else is against you, don’t give up. When you feel tempted to become just like the rest of the world around you, don’t give in. Because **GOD WINS**. He overcomes the culture around us. Jesus doesn't crumble, His Kingdom doesn't crumble, the culture loses. That’s comforting.

In chapter 19, there is a scene of a banquet that is set for a wedding. At a wedding, you expect a bride and a groom. But instead, in walks a king. And he's not dressed in his royal garb. He's dressed in his full battle array. He's ready to go to war. And then you see this image of pagan nations banding together in opposition of this great king. And you can see everyone kind of bracing for a great cosmic battle. Something amazing is about to happen. And then it’s over almost as fast as it begins. It’s an absolute bloodbath. One-sided. It's not even close. There's no battle of Armageddon; there's just a slaughter of God's opposition. It's the most one-sided battle in all of history. There's a sword coming out of Jesus' mouth that slaughters every opposer and we're told that the birds of the air come in and feast on the flesh of the victims. It is gruesome … and it is glorious all at once. Guys, **GOD WINS**. And that’s comforting.

But there is one more who stands opposed to God. In chapter 20 he appears as a great dragon. It's Satan himself. And he's slaughtered. He's taken out. He's killed. He's defeated. **GOD WINS**. No one is left to stand in opposition of Jesus. Even the evil forces trying to drag you down will one day lose. And that’s comforting.

Doesn’t that do something for you? Isn’t it good to know that, in the midst of the battles you are facing right now … and as you aren’t quite sure how exactly God may work and whether or not victories are on the way … isn’t it good to know that regardless of how things play out … you’re on the winning side? Isn’t it an incredible blessing that Jesus has laid out these promises to us? Doesn’t it stir something within you to know that God wins … and you’re on his team … so you win?

**Rocks and Promises**

Church, we need to remember the future. That’s a weird statement to make, but you need to remember what hasn't happened yet. Jesus promised hard times; we've already seen that, but He also promised victory. He also promised that He would make all things right. He also promised that He's going to win.

When you're really hurting, when you feel like you're really struggling, when it feels like life is pressing in on you on all sides, in a moment like that, you need to remember what is going to happen in the future. You need to remember a promise from a guy who has fulfilled every other promise. You can trust Jesus. Jesus keeps his word. You can trust the future Jesus has laid out.

We've got to look back in order to know the future. Remember, the best way to know what's going to happen in the future is to look back and see what God has already done. And, you got to look at these rocks. Because they don't just tell the stories of victories in the past; they also tell the story of promises that have been fulfilled, which makes us look forward to the promises that are still hanging in the balance.

That's why there are more rocks off to the side. Because we know there's going to be more victories; we know God's going to do more stuff. It's weird, but we've got to remember something that hasn't happened yet, so we don't give up. Instead, we remember.

We remember a God who is a promise keeper. Our faith is built on a God who is a promise keeper. So don’t start doubting him now. Don’t give up. Don’t give in. Remember the promises; we remember the promises that are still laying out there in front of us, the things that have not yet happened. And we trust that God's going to work and that He's going to fulfill those promises just as he has fulfilled so many promises before.

Don’t forget the promises. Remember.