

Reminding of the Past

Vignette #1

She screamed.

She screamed so loud I thought my ears would bleed. She was crying again about our relationship. How it had gone sour. How she didn't want to see me anymore. How our love was dead.

Could that happen? Could love actually die? Or was it a feeling that died and not the action? Certainly our relationship was strained—it was falling apart at the seams. We used to be so close, and yet I hear her now screaming, "This isn't how marriage is meant to be!"

Much of it started when she had an affair. How it hurts and angers me just to think about it. I told her I knew. But she just kept going. The more I forgave, the further she fell from me. She reached a point where it could no longer be worked out. We saw each other now on the weekends, but her days and nights she spent at her job's leased apartment. I could only assume what was happening there. I can't even think about it. Her separation from me began a long time ago, I suppose, in her heart of hearts. Her back began to turn towards me until finally I seemed to forget what she looked like. Her unfaithfulness ripped my insides apart. What happened to what we were? To the words we said when we were first in

love? To our vows that pledged unity through all storms? It seems they have all been forgotten. But I remember them.

"I pledged to love and cherish you until death parted us, to stay true in every circumstance. I will honor that vow if you will turn back to me."

But these words only make her more angry. I see more blood rush to her cheeks and realize that she has already made her choice. Our relationship is shattered and torn. It is irreparable unless a change of heart and mind and action occur.

Who ran away? She did. Who broke love? She did. And I come to question "Who are you?" She was my wife of many years, but "Now who are you?"

"I have loved you with an everlasting love (but you have not loved me), come back to me and I will come back to you. I will let go of the pain of the past and will replace it with the promises of the past if you will only be mine"... (but you would not listen).

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 (NIV)

Suppose there are prophets among you or those who dream dreams about the future, and they promise you signs or miracles, and the predicted signs or miracles occur. If they then say, 'Come, let us worship other gods' – gods you have not known before—do not listen to them. The LORD your God is testing you to see if you truly love him with all your heart and soul. Serve only the LORD your God and fear him alone. Obey his commands, listen to his voice, and cling to him. The false

prophets or visionaries who try to lead you astray must be put to death, for they encourage rebellion against the LORD your God, who redeemed you from slavery and brought you out of the land of Egypt. Since they try to lead you astray from the way the LORD your God commanded you to live, you must put them to death. In this way you will purge the evil from among you.

Prophecy is like a husband, bereft of his lover through her own choice, or like an aging relationship that is being renewed. Prophecy reminds people of past promises, choices, sins, protection, care, punishment, and revelation. If prophecy does not stay true to past revelation, it is *false* prophecy. It never changes or does away with past prophecy, but rather fulfills or enlarges it. Prophecy points to the past in order to instruct the present.

Past Promises

God has made many promises throughout history. Some of these promises are called "covenants" (testaments, contracts, agreements). Some are specific to an individual, some are general and all-inclusive (like God's promise never destroy the earth again with water). Most of God's promises seem to move from specific to general, or from general to specific. For instance, Abraham was promised a "seed" (a specific promise of heredity) that would be a blessing to all nations (a general and universal application of God's blessing of Abraham to include the whole human race). Another example might be God's promise of blessings on Israel because of Abraham (general) to God's specific promises of blessings or curses as a

result of Israel's obedience or disobedience to him. Because God's words are always true, in effect every word of God is a promise. These promises often present people with choices (obedience or disobedience, belief or unbelief). These are conditional promises.

Past Choices

Prophecy itself, as a reminding of the past, is a presentation of choices that have been made or that could have been made, and the results of those choices. Prophecy points to events in the past that revealed God's watershed actions on humanity's behalf. When humans are confronted with the rule of God, and the power of his presence in history, they are given a choice. To neglect to make the choice is still a choice. The choice is between belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience, mercy or punishment. Prophecy reminds people who have chosen to follow God in the past of their decision (to encourage them to keep on in their commitment). It reminds people of their past sins and disobedience and the resulting punishment in order to bring people back to God's mercy and forgiveness. It reveals what could (or should) have been in order to press upon people the importance of present decisions. It reminds people of what has gone wrong in order to make it right again.

Past Sins

Humans are sinful, while God remains sinless. If the God-man relationship is tattered and torn, it is humanity's fault. Prophecy points to the past, and in our past looms sin, like a vulture, shredding the flesh of that which is perishing. We and our world are being eaten alive by our own wrong decisions. Humans have consciences, natural revelation, God's word, and their own memory which points to guiltiness. Satan is constantly accusing humans of their fallenness, their unworthiness before God, and the utter despair of their situation. God reminds humans of past sins not to condemn them but to lift them from the bondage of sin, to offer hope and a future, to give the invaluable gift of forgiveness. But God's justice and man's sin requires death as the penalty for human pride, envy, murder, covetousness, drunkenness, immorality, and lies. When God points back to past human sin, he does so in order to offer a solution in Christ.

Past Protection

God has shown himself worthy of worship. He has protected his people. He has had compassion on the lonely, the afflicted, the downcast. The poor have been made rich, the weak strong, the spiritually empty full. Time and again threats invaded the human landscape that seemed to put God's plans in peril, but when God acted, his plan was fulfilled in the midst of this earthly travail.

Past Punishment

Of course, sometimes this travail was just and God ordained and served his purpose of holiness, justice, and true love. God has punished the world, his people, and even individuals for their wrong choices, and these punishments serve as beacons of who God is. God is not only loving, he is just. He is not only just, he is loving. God always mixes judgment with mercy. When divine judgment comes, people are given a choice beforehand. And afterwards, when God's prophets turn to see what has been, they are reminded of God's ultimate mercy on their behalf.

Past Revelation

God is a revealer. It is not incumbent upon him to reveal himself to us, but he has chosen, and this is how he works. God shows a little of his glory, his love, his justice, his person, in order to draw people into relationship with him. God progressively reveals more throughout history about himself, our world, and our selves. Our understanding grows because he has taken the initiative to find us and show us what is real. Prophecy points backward to what God has already shown us in order to understand who he is, who we are in him, and where he (and us) are going in history. Prophecy does not merely "use" past revelation as a springboard for personal thoughts, but brings past revelation into clearer focus. If past revelation is not taken seriously, prophecy threatens to distort the nature of God, humans, and the world, and to blacken what God has brought to light. Prophecy must remain true to past revelation (including past prophecy) or it is not truly divine in origin.

God tells us to remember the former things in history. The events that brought us to where we are. No human is without history—without context. We all have memory. We all have events that have changed our views of God, the world, and ourselves. Without God's direction through prophecy, it is difficult to understand how it is that God has worked in the past and how he is shaping the world for reconciliation with himself. God loves all humanity, and wants people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to believe in his Son and receive salvation direct from his heart, but time has a way of watering down this love. We are changing creatures, who must eat and drink daily to live. Likewise, that spiritual substance which was provided by God in the past (his word) must be renewed in the present. Love must be continually renewed. That is not to say that all God's previous actions must be redone (for Christ died once for all), but rather to say that humans need constant renewal and reminding of the past.