**THE POWER OF THE PAST**

Sunday School Lesson 2

*FORMER THINGS*

Philippians 3:12

2/13/2022

**Introduction:** We ended our first lesson in this series by observing the outcomes that the past produces in the present and into the future. Unfortunately, we did not have much time during the Sunday School hour to look fully into this topic. Fortunately, we are going to pick up right where we left off from last week and further explore the power the past has on the present and the future. We know that the past does impact the present in a significant way. It informs our current decision making. It also impacts the present because of the principle of sowing and reaping. As much as we would like to run from and avoid this principle at times in our lives, it’s still there to affect our present circumstances. Thankfully, we do know that the hand of the Lord can and does intervene in how much power the past is allowed to have over the present. The best example of this is our salvation. On the day of our salvation, all of our past sins no longer had power over the destination of the soul. God forgave us of those sins, and He has forgotten them. On the other hand, when we fast forward to today, the Lord allows the power of our past decision regarding salvation to continue in the present as our sins after salvation are covered under the blood of Jesus in just the same manner as those that took place before our salvation. Let’s explore additional thoughts related to the power of the past.

1. **THE PAST HAS POWER IN THE MIND BUT SHOULD NOT HAVE POWER OVER THE MIND.**
2. **Notice that we have the ability to remember or to forget the former things, although some things are more difficult than others (Deuteronomy 4:31; 8:11-14; 9:7; Psalm 78:7; 103:2; 119:93; Proverbs 3:1; 4:5; Isaiah 43:18; 46:9; 49:15; Jeremiah 2:32; Philippians 3:13).** One of the most challenging things about the past is that it continues to come up in our minds, as we noted last week. Events of the past have a way of coming to mind, even when we do not want them to. The mind is one of God’s amazing creations. It is the storage drive of past events in our lives. The question is whether we have any power over what past events come to mind, or if we are subjected to never-ending memories that we may or may not want. I think the answer is clear from what the Bible commands us to do. Repeatedly, we are told in Scripture to either remember something or forget it. This tells us that we can direct our thoughts and memories to specific things. How do we do that? Meditation, dwelling, and keeping are the key in this. You cannot control what others do and how that prompts memories of former things in your life, but you do have the choice of whether to dwell on those past events in your thoughts.
3. **Notice that we are to give the power of our mind over to Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16; Ephesians 4:34; Philippians 2:5; 4:7; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16; 11:15).** While the past is notto have the power over the mind, there is One who should be given that power. That’s the Lord Jesus Christ. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. In context, we understand this to be speaking primarily of the focus of the mind. Our mind ought not to be focused on carnal things but on spiritual things. Yet, as this relates to the topic of the past and its power in the mind, does this not also encourage us to seek the Lord for help on the topic? We do not know all of the inner workings of the heart and mind, but we do know the Creator. His Spirit dwells within our bodies. Let’s go to the Lord in prayer to help us to train our minds to focus on the right things. Ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to bring to mind those things which are profitable to the work of God. In the book of Hebrews, we see that the Lord will put or write His laws into our minds. Who are we giving the power to when it comes to the mind? Are we letting our past have power over it, or are we submitting the mind to Christ?
4. **THE PAST HAS POWER OVER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES BUT NOT OVER DECISIONS.**

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1. **Notice that most of our present circumstances exist through the power of our past decisions (James 1:13-14; Genesis 4:3-7, 13-16; Deuteronomy 30:19; Galatians 6:7-8; Romans 8:22; Isaiah 59:2).** This refers back more specifically to the thought that we ended the last lesson on – sowing and reaping. Of course, it is important to note that not every circumstance you encounter is the result of your own past decision. The disciples had this logic when it came to the blind man mentioned in John 9. They thought that someone had to be responsible for this man’s circumstances. In that case, the Lord had allowed the circumstance to occur for His own divine purpose to show the mighty work of God. While we will have circumstances that come up in similar fashion, it is safe to say that we will also have many circumstances that arise as a direct result of our past decisions. Every decision of our past has put us on a specific path and direction that has led us to this present moment. It’s always sad to see folks who are unwilling to admit that their own past is the reason why they are dealing with certain things in the present.
2. **Notice that while our past does inform our decisions, it does not have power over our decisions (Jonah 3:1-4; Ecclesiastes 1:9; 3:15; 2 Corinthians 6:2; 1 Samuel 13:13-14).** We noted last week that the past is a very helpful tool when it comes to our current decision making. Yet, we must also note that the past does not have power over our current decisions. You’ve probably heard the statement made that the past is destined to repeat itself. In fact, this statement comes from Biblical truth found in the book of Ecclesiastes. Yet, it does not mean that the past has power over our individual decisions. Instead, it refers more broadly to the fact that the world continues in the same overall cycle of sin and death. How much power that our past has on our decisions is up to us as we make them. King Saul had made some poor decisions, and he found his circumstances to be unpleasant when Samuel confronted him. Did Saul have to continue to make poor decisions because of his past? Of course not. Jonah learned from his past, and he made a different decision the second time that the Word of the Lord came unto him.
3. **THE PAST HAS POWER OVER OUR TESTIMONY BUT NOT OVER WHO WE MAY BECOME.**
4. **Notice that the past is what defines our present testimony for better or for worse (Acts 9:26-28; 22:17-21; Proverbs 22:1; Ecclesiastes 10:1; Matthew 7:16-20).** The past events leading up to this present moment are what dictate your testimony to others. Of course, some past events have a greater impact on your testimony than other events. The Bible tells us that even a little folly can cause great harm to our reputation. That’s the power of the past. It dictates to others who we are. The apostle Paul probably had to deal with this truth more than anyone else in the Bible. By the time of his conversion, he had developed quite a reputation based on former things that he had done. He was an enemy to the church that the Lord had established. It should not be surprising that people were slow to believe anything else about Paul. His testimony was filled with horrible decisions. We must be careful not to get frustrated when our past seems to have a strong control over our testimony. Others can only work with what they have seen. We know people by their fruits. The past has much power over our testimony.
5. **Notice that the past has limited power over what we may yet become (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Jeremiah 26:13; 13:23; Hosea 4:7; Revelation 3:1; Philippians 3:21).** There is some power that the past has even over what we may yet become. As mentioned in the introduction, our past decision to receive Christ guarantees what will become of us. That beautiful and blessed change will take place. We also understand basic concepts of how some past events anchor what we may yet become. For example, a pregnant woman will become a mother because of the past. Yet, the past does not have full power over what we may yet be. Paul reminded the church that some of them used to be wicked people, but it was not who they were any more. The Israelites were reminded of how often they had turned away from the Lord, yet the Lord showed them that there was a future that could still be different from what they were currently. The church in Sardis had a reputation based on their past that indicated that they would continue to be a strong church, yet the Lord noted that they had a name of being living but were dead.
6. **THE PAST HAD POWER IN PRIOR VICTORIES BUT NOT OVER FUTURE BATTLES.**
7. **Notice that current battles are won through a combination of the past and the present (1 Chronicles 29:11; 2 Samuel 23:10; Proverbs 21:31; Ephesians 6:15).** Preparation is important in battle. How can one expect to have victory if they have not used their past to prepare them for the present conflict? It’s often said that you cannot wait until you are in the trial to prepare yourself for the trial. Yet, the past does not even have full power over present battles. The Lord is the One who brings the victory, and He can bring victory even in situations where our past has failed us to be ready for the battle. Additionally, different events of our past may compete against each other to help or hurt in present battle. Joshua felt good about his battle against AI because of the past, but another past event hurt them. Samson felt good about his battle against the Philistines because of the past, but another past event caused him to be defeated. The past helps in our current battles in conjunction first with the hand of the Lord.
8. **Notice that our past success does not promise us future victories: those come through faith and God’s promises (1 John 5:4; Luke 5:4-6; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 2 Samuel 11:1-4).** Our pride would like to convince us that our past successes are our own and that those successes guarantee some type of future victory. Yet, victory comes from faith in the promises of the Lord. King David had experienced a string of victories in his life leading up to the events of 2 Samuel 11. He stayed in his palace with the expectation that those victories would continue. Instead, he found personal defeat of the flesh there in the palace, as he sinned against the Lord. When it comes to victory through Christ, the past is actually a great indicator of future victory. When it comes to our flesh, that is definitely not the case. Anyone who is prideful enough to expect future success because of past success is well-positioned to find future failure instead. The past does not have power to give us victory in future battles.