

One Generation to Another

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 September 2023

Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

[0 : 00] We hope that you enjoy this teaching from Christ Church. This material is copyrighted and no unauthorized duplication, redistribution, or any other use of any part is permitted without prior consent from Christ Church.

Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Hi, my name is Constance St. Clair, and I'm part of the Christ Church Youth Group.

Today's reading is from the book of Judges, chapter 2, verses 6 to 19. A reading from the book of Judges. After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their own inheritance.

The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things that the Lord had done for Israel. Joshua, son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110, and they buried him in the land of his inheritance at Timnath-Herez in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gash.

After that, whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors. Another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals.

[1 : 23] They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

In his anger against Israel, the Lord gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hands of these raiders.

Yet they would not listen to their judges, but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshipped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the Lord's commands.

Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived. For the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them.

[2 : 26] But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

A reading from the book of Psalms, Psalm 145, verse 4. One generation commends your works to another. They tell of your mighty acts. The grass withers and the flowers fade.

The word of our God stands forever. Good morning, Christ Church. This summer I was on the beach having and enjoying a great vacation.

And I was reading a book by Professor Jean Twenge, who's a professor down at San Diego State University. And perhaps you've read or heard of some of these books that she's written.

She has these fantastic, long, ridiculously long titles. In 2006, she wrote a book called *Generation Me*. Why today's young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled, and more miserable than ever before.

[3 : 33] Now, that was about Pastor Andrew's generation. Then she did some more research. And in 2018, she wrote a book called *iGen*. Why today's super connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, and less happy.

And what that means for the rest of us. So, these are, I didn't read these books. Their titles have been intriguing to me. So, I did pick up her newest book that she wrote this past year called Generations.

The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silence. And what they mean for America's future. And I commend it to you because there's incredible insight in terms of the differences that we experience between the generations in our families, in our workplaces, in society at large, and even here in the church.

Professor Twinge says this. She says, Millennials are the least religious generation of younger adults in American history. Gen Z is even more disconnected from religion than millennials were at the same age.

So, I'm reading this book at the beach. And then I get a text from Pastor Andrew. And the text says, Hope you're having a good time away, bro. This is where I, this is where I'm a bro sort of level.

[4 : 47] Hope you're having a good time away, bro. Just wanted to share this word I came across today that hit me hard as our next generation ministries and our need to develop disciple makers has been on my heart. And the text that he sent was what we just read in Judges 2.

So, I promptly texted him back and I said, Why are you interrupting my vacation? No, I texted him back and I said, Thank you so much for sharing those verses we're speaking to me this time last year.

I'm eager to pray, read, and think together more about our next generation challenges and opportunities. And I promptly went back to reading at the beach. But the reason we're preaching this text today is because the Holy Spirit has put it on the hearts of both of your pastors.

And for better or for worse, the Gen X pastor is preaching it today. And not our millennial pastor, but we're kind of doing this with the same heart and mind. If you're Gen Z or iGen, that means you were born from 1997 to 2012.

And we're so delighted that you're here. If you're Gen Polar, that means like Walter, you were born 2013 or later. And they're calling it Gen Polar because you were born in a time of political polarization.

[5 : 58] And also in a time when the polar ice caps are melting. So, real positive things going on here. Some people are calling you Gen Alpha, which, you know, is a little more generic and sort of optimistic.

But we're so glad that you're here. And what I want to do today is just I hope to help all of the generations in the room just sort of think together about how can we better engage people in their teens and 20s now.

And people who are very quickly going to be in their teens and 20s in just a few years. How can we understand you? How can we address your questions? How can we invite you and your friends to explore God with us?

How can we transmit the historic Christian faith successfully from one generation to the next generation? And Judges 2 is just such a great text to help us think with this lens of the generations. Okay? So, what I want to talk about from Judges 2 are three things. Conforming to culture, cherishing God's grace, and commending God's works.

[7 : 07] Conforming to culture, cherishing God's grace, commending God's works. Just a word about conforming to culture. Look again at verse 10. And I lost my place here.

I've got to find this. This is a book in the Old Testament after Joshua. Here it is. Judges 2.10. And after that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.

That's one of the saddest and most sobering verses in the whole Bible. And in many ways, it's a wake-up call and a challenge to each new generation. Because it tells us that there are forces that are pulling us and pulling the next generation away from the Lord and from his people.

It tells us that we're not living in a vacuum. We're not living on neutral ground. The Israelites had just entered into the promised land. And the dominant culture in the promised land was Canaanite culture.

And what we're told in verse 11 is that then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt.

[8 : 16] They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. Now, why did the next generation not follow the Lord?

Because they, like us, lived in a pluralistic society and they saw what all the peoples around them were doing. And what they were doing was offering to the people of God something more attractive, something more alluring and enticing.

And they began to assimilate and to conform to Canaanite culture. And where did they turn? We're told that they turned to Baal. Baal was the storm god of rain and fertility.

And they also turned to Ashtoreth, who's sort of the counterpart to Baal, the goddess that goes along with Baal. She's the goddess of love and productivity. And every little town or village would reproduce these little idols of the Baals and the Ashtoreths.

And so here are these gods of fertility and productivity. Gods of money, sex, and power. Gods of pleasure and plenty.

[9 : 24] Gods of success and security. And the people of God began to say, well, man, why do we need the Lord if we can get all that we need without him?

And they knew the Ten Commandments. I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. That's the first and greatest of all the commands.

They knew that. And yet they saw this alternative system of beliefs and practices and they said, we want that instead. And our own situation is not too remote from the judges.

The church today is living in the midst of a pluralist society that's full of people who don't worship God, but they worship God's substitutes. Right? Little things that are made ultimate things like work or your body or romance or, I don't know, leisure, comfort.

Any number of things we can say, this is of ultimate value to me. This is functionally my God. God. And those gods that are surrounding us have a very strong pull to conform to that culture.

[10 : 38] And I want to be careful here because the United States is complex. Amen? And I want to be careful not to oversimplify things because on the one hand, our culture is actually becoming more religious and more Christian the more immigrants come to our country and the more people discover God.

So that's going on. But simultaneously, what's also going on, on the other hand, is that we're becoming more and more secular. Both are happening at the same time. Over the past 200 years, we've seen an age come in that the philosophers call the secular age.

And the emphasis is all on the saculum, on the here and now, without any concept of an eternal transcendent order. So that meaning in life and guidance and happiness, all these things are understood and sought in terms of present time economic prosperity, material comfort, emotional fulfillment.

That's what the secular belief system claims to make the most sense of our complex world and of human experience. And that has become, for most of us in the places where we live, that's the default background belief system that permeates all of life.

And what are some of the secular beliefs in the system that are taken by faith? Well, here's just a sampling, and there are many.

[12 : 08] But you don't need to believe in God to have a full life of meaning, hope, and satisfaction. You should be free to live as you see fit as long as you don't harm others.

You become yourself when you are true to your deepest desires and dreams. You don't need to believe in God to have a basis for moral values and human rights.

There's little to no evidence for the existence of God and the truth of Christianity. And wittingly or unwittingly, our cultural institutions inculcate these beliefs as inarguable, obvious truths.

Right? Right? They immerse us in narratives all day long about meaning, satisfaction, identity, freedom, morality. And these come at us dozens of times a day, sometimes dozens of times an hour through ads and tweets and music and shows and op-ed pieces, all of which accumulate and say, this is the way things are.

And this is unchallenged common sense. And because these narratives are so alluring and because our immersion in them is so pervasive, we're not even aware of them, verses 10 to 13 are really kind of just happening to Christians and to churches all over the Western world, particularly here in North America.

[13 : 31] And we find ourselves following the gods of the peoples around us, idols of consumerism, idols of individualism, idols of the self. And the result of that is that we know neither the Lord nor what he's done for us.

And we could spend hours talking about how the next generation of the church is deconstructing in their faith. The next generation of the church is de-churching. The next generation of the church is becoming more and more secularized.

And what I mean by that is not some culture warrior weird sort of thing, okay? Not a political sort of thing either. But what I mean by that is this, that even people who identify as Christian start to choose lovers, spouses, careers, friendships, financial options with no higher goal than our own present time personal happiness.

Beyond that, sacrificing personal peace or affluence for transcendent causes is becoming more and more rare, even among people who say they believe in absolute values and eternity.

The secular age, I think it's pretty clear that the secular age has begun to thin out our faith so that it's really just simply one more choice in life alongside our job, alongside our recreation, our hobbies, our politics, rather than our faith being this comprehensive framework that determines all of our life choices.

[14:59] And why am I telling you this? Is it because I'm paranoid? Okay, I feel your judgment right now. No, I just don't want you to be naive.

I don't want you to be naive. And if Christian people don't get serious about this all-pervasive, immersive process of enculturation and assimilation that's conforming us in powerful ways to secularity and secularism, we should not be surprised that we ourselves or the next generation after us is running after these gods of the people around us, thinking that money or sex or power or anything else is an ultimate thing when it's not.

It's not difficult to imagine this four-generational downward spiral in our own day from indifference to unbelief to rejection to opposition. Generation one is marked by apathy.

I don't care what I believe. Therefore, generation two is marked by agnosticism. I don't know what I believe. Therefore, generation three is marked by atheism. I know what I don't believe.

And therefore, generation four is marked by aggression. I don't want you to believe either. We just need eyes to see. We need ears to hear.

[16:19] We need minds that can discern these alternative secular beliefs and practices as they're showing up everywhere in our lives to conform us to the now dominant and default paradigm and to ask ourselves, how does this compare and contrast with Christian claims and Christian beliefs and Christian practices?

We just finished this letter to the Romans where the Apostle Paul says in Romans 12, he says, do not be conformed to the pattern of this world. Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its mold.

Rather, he says, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Israel was very clearly called to be this counterculture. They were supposed to be this alternative, nonconformist society that bore witness to the light and the glory of God to all the nations.

And that's what the church is called to be today. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount to his disciple community, he says, you're the salt of the earth and you're the light of the world. And so he's saying, don't allow yourself to be conformed to the world and its decay and the world of its darkness.

I want you to go out and be salt in the decay. I want you to be light in the darkness. And so that's, I just think, part of this word for us about conforming to culture and just thinking more critically about this very, very important dynamic in the scriptures and this dynamic in our lives and our own world.

[17:54] You with me so far? Okay, so second word is not just conforming to culture, but it's cherishing God's grace. Cherishing God's grace. It's kind of an understatement to say that things did not go well for Israel when they abandoned the Lord.

We see it in this text, you know, in verse 14, it says, they couldn't resist their enemies and they were plundered. It says in verse 15, the hand of the Lord was heavy against them so that they were living lives that were defeated and distressed.

And then we read in verse 16, it says, then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. The Lord is so gracious, right? He's the Lord of grace.

He wants to help his people. He wants to save his people. And he does that over and over. But we're told in verses 17 to 19, they just, even after they experienced God's grace, they didn't listen. They didn't obey. And because of that, they became more and more oppressed and afflicted. God then again would have compassion and he would save his people. But even still, they become more and more corrupt and more and more evil in this decline from bad to worse.

[19 : 01] You read the book of Judges? It gets really gnarly. This downward spiral in this book happens over the course of the next 450 years. The next generations just repeat this cycle of idolatry and immorality.

Horrible and heinous things are done that are just completely cringe-worthy. In fact, I would say, parents, there's R-rated stuff at the end of this book that you shouldn't even let your kids read yet. And some of you, I know, because I said that, you're going to go home this afternoon and be like, what in the world is in there? And that's a good thing. But this book, in a nutshell, is about, it's really about the grace of God.

It's about this God who gives grace to people who don't deserve it. This God who gives grace to people who aren't seeking it. This God who gives grace to people who don't even appreciate it after they've gotten it.

And it's also a book about our need for a savior, right? Because when you read the book, you're like, man, despite all the ways that God is forgiving and helping and delivering and sending leaders to his people, in the end, nothing's really able to overcome their selfishness and their pride and their rebellion.

[20 : 13] And at the end of the book, the very last line of this book says this. It says, So Judges shows us that, you know, not only are we prone to sin, but it shows us our need for a savior and a king.

And it shows us that if salvation is going to come to us, it's not coming from among us, right? It's got to come from God. It's got to come from God and his grace. And by the end of this book, if you really sit down and read it, you're just longing for someone who can come and break the cycle of sin.

You're longing for someone who has no sin, someone who could come and deliver God's people from sin. You're just crying out to God by the end of this book and saying, God, you continually come and intervene and save your people, but would you come and do that in a climactic way? Would you come do that finally? Would you come and do that once and for all? And of course, the good news that we find in the New Testament is that eventually God answers that prayer. And this God of grace sends Jesus Christ, right? He sends his sinless son to be the savior and king that his people need. He sends his son to live the life that we're meant to live, but that none of us are really able to live.

[21 : 38] He sends his son to die this death that we deserve to die. And Jesus comes and we see powerfully in the gospels that Jesus is setting people free from their idols.

He's setting people free from their cycles of addiction and this downward spiral of sin. Because Jesus is this God of grace in the flesh.

Jesus is this God of grace embodied. And when Jesus is calling disciples, not only in that first generation of his disciples, but when he's calling disciples in each new generation to follow him and to learn from him, what does Jesus want for us?

What's his vision for us? Jesus' vision for us for each new generation is so clearly, beautifully stated in verse 10. His desire for us is simply that we would know the Lord and what he's done for Israel. That we would know the Lord and what he's done for Israel. That we would know this God of grace and all his gracious acts to save us. Now, some knowledge is generic, you know, theoretical, academic sort of awareness about basic information and basic facts.

[22 : 57] And we would call that knowledge about. But knowledge about is something other than a knowledge of. Right? A knowledge of is something quite different.

A knowledge of is a personal and relational knowing. So that what you know, you come to cherish what you know. And that's what Jesus wants for each new generation.

That we would not just know the Lord, we would cherish the Lord. That we would cherish his person, his character, his attributes. That we would have a living experience with the living God. God. He wants us to know the life and the power and the grace of God. Not just in our heads, but in our hearts. Not just in a theoretical way, but in a personal and real way.

And beyond that, more than that, he wants us to not just cherish the Lord himself. But he wants us to cherish what the Lord has done. All of his works. All of his gracious acts to save.

[24 : 01] And that means that he wants you to be regularly learning about what God and his grace has done in history. And he wants you to be expanding and increasing your reading and your understanding of God's own self-revelation.

His own revelation of himself in the story of scripture. And here's my word, if you're starting to fall asleep at this point. Here's my word for Gen X, millennials, Gen Z, and polars.

And if you're a boomer or silent, we're delighted you're here too. And you can just listen into this word. But what this means to me is that each new generation needs its own experience of the reviving life of God.

So that we can say, we know the Lord. Not they knew the Lord and they talked to us about the Lord, but we know the Lord. And each generation also beyond that needs a deep understanding of God's words and God's ways.

So that we also can say, we know what the Lord has done. Not they knew what the Lord has done and they tried to tell us what the Lord has done. But we know what the Lord has done.

[25 : 14] And that's my prayer is that our next generations would know the Lord and what he's done. They would know this God of grace and all of his gracious actions to save his people.

And the reason I pray that is because we won't commend what we don't cherish. We just won't commend to other people what we don't cherish ourselves.

But the thing that we cherish the most, that is what we're going to commend to other people without even thinking about it. We're going to do it just with ease and with joy. Tell other people what we most cherish, right?

So that's my word about conforming to culture, cherishing God's grace. And a final word, a short word about commending God's works. Commending God's works.

Here's the question as I've been reading this text for the past year plus. Here's the question that really troubles me. What went wrong?

[26 : 16] What went wrong? Like how do we go from this Joshua generation that says we had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. How do we get from that to the next generation in verse 10 who knew neither the Lord nor what he'd done for Israel.

How do we go from the Joshua generation that served the Lord for a lifetime to this next generation in verse 12 that forsook the Lord and followed and worshiped the various gods of the peoples around them.

We sent this text over to our retreat speaker next weekend, Bob, who you're going to love. And Bob wrote back and he said, wow, this is such a cautionary story for the church, isn't it?

He said, for all the good the Joshua generation did, they failed to make disciples and their legacy died with them and the result was that evil flourished. But contrast that, he says, to a new Joshua and a better Joshua.

Yeshua of Nazareth, Jesus Christ. He pursued and he invested in the next generation of teenagers and 20-somethings. That's Peter, Andrew, James, John.

[27 : 20] They were teenagers and early 20-somethings. And he welcomed them into his spiritual family. He trained them to do what he did. He empowered them with the Holy Spirit. He sent them out on mission.

And the world has never been the same. So I want to think together in my final few minutes here about making disciples of the next generation. And I want to talk about the who, what, how, when, where, and why.

Okay? So first of all, the who, I love this verse in Psalm 145, 4. It says, one generation will commend your works to another and declare your mighty acts.

One generation, collectively, corporately, in solidarity and in unity with one another, all of us, whether we're single or married without kids or parents or grandparents, one generation will commend your works to another.

And our hope and our prayer is that when you come to Christchurch, that you would look out in our church and you wouldn't say, oh, there's so-and-so's kid or there's so-and-so's youth. You would say, no, that's my kid. That's my youth.

[28 : 26] And I want to extend that out to our Cal students and our 20-somethings. And for us to say, man, how can I come to Christchurch with eyes for the next generation today?

What can I give to them? Who's the middle schooler or high schooler God's calling me to encourage? Who's the college student or the 20-something who needs lunch today and who needs to come do their laundry at my house today?

That's the who is one generation commending your works to another. Then the what. One generation commending your works to the next generation.

Research tells us, social scientists tell us that the next generation on the receiving end, they need a five-to-one ratio.

That is, they need a team of five adults investing in every one person in the next generation for their faith to become sticky. For them to move into adulthood with a robust and a resilient faith that's going to last.

[29 : 28] Five-to-one. And so we want to encourage you to take spiritual responsibility for one person in the next generation in our church.

And someone that doesn't belong to you biologically, but does belong to you spiritually. And we want to encourage you to start intentionally praying for them.

And then talking to them. And then pursuing them and investing in them. Because disciple making is not, it's not something that just happens by accident.

It's not something you drift into. You don't wake up, you know, and say, wow, we disciplined a bunch of people who weren't even trying. That's not how it works, you know. It's intentional. It's deliberate. So that's the who. That's the what. But let me say something about the how, the when, and the where. I read one of the scholars of the Old Testament. He said this about this text this week.

[30 : 24] He said, this text in Judges 2 is a witness to the apparent failure of the community to keep alive its memory of Yahweh's gracious saving acts.

The priests, the priests failed in their instructional duties. And the elaborate system of festivals, memorials, gatherings, other customs designed to pass on the rich spiritual tradition had either lapsed or become reduced to formality.

That means people were showing up like once or twice a month. He says, if the Shema, that is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. If the Shema was being recited at all, the following injunctions to the community to instruct the children and the fundamentals of covenant faith were obviously regarded more in the breach than in the observance.

And then he says, when people lose sight of God's grace, they lose sight of God in the sense that they have any obligation to God. And all that follows in this book is a consequence of Israel's loss of memory.

And Daniel Block is giving us something very important, a principle that's very important for us, and that is this, compounding spiritual interest.

[31 : 44] What we're doing right now doesn't seem like much today. What we're going to do over the next month doesn't seem like a lot.

Even this next year, it doesn't seem like a lot. But 10 years from now, any of you into finance, compounding interest, 10 years from now, 20 years from now, 30 years from now, that stuff adds up.

You know, when you get your people around the elders teaching God's word, when you get your people into these gatherings where we're passing on the spiritual tradition that we have, when you're gathering as a family around meals and devotions and commuting, and you're trying to talk to your kids about what it means to be a Christian and what the scriptures teach, all of that really adds up.

And what the psalmist tells us is that one generation commends your works to another. One generation declares your mighty acts. To commend means to praise, not to talk boringly.

To declare means to boast and not to talk theoretically. That psalm goes on in the next few verses. It says, One generation will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty to the next.

[33 : 00] One generation will proclaim the power of your awesome works to the next. One generation will celebrate your abundant goodness to the next. One generation will joyfully sing of your righteousness to the next.

And friends, at least Gen Xers. I'll just single out my cynical people. Gen Xers. What the next generation needs from us is they need to hear us commend and declare and proclaim and celebrate and joyfully sing about our God.

Our God whom we cherish above all else. Our God of whom we say, Life isn't worth living without this God. Right? You, Lord, are better than life itself.

They need to hear us talking about that. And my last thing is the why. And we're ready to go. We got a great lunch prepared for us. 100 people.

100 seats. It's going to be awesome. But here's my final why. And it's just a scripture reading. And it's very similar to Psalm 145. It's from Psalm 78. And I'm just going to read it to you in hopes that you'll meditate on it this week.

[34 : 13] Psalm 78 says, Things we have heard and known. Things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their children.

But tell to the coming generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel which He commanded our ancestors to teach their children.

So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born. And they in turn would arise and tell them to their children. That's four generations. And now the psalmist tells us, he comes to the answer of why should we disciple the next generation?

He says, So that, so that they should put their trust in God. And would not forget the works of God, but would keep His commands. And that they would not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation.

A generation whose heart was not loyal to God, whose spirit was not faithful to God. Friends, if you know, love, worship, or follow Jesus Christ, I want to encourage you to thank God today for whoever passed the gospel on to you.

[35 : 28] Maybe even call them or write to them and say thank you. Try to imagine where you'd be today if they hadn't prayed for you, pursued you, and invested in you. And then I want you to find one person as fast as you can in the next generation behind you.

And begin to take spiritual responsibility for passing the faith on to them. Why? So that they might know the Lord. So that they might fear the Lord.

So that they might love and worship and follow and trust and surrender their lives and be loyal and faithful and spend the rest of the time that they have on this earth. Making the glory of God known among their neighbors.

And among the nations. And among the next generation. That's what God wants for his people. That's what he wants for us.

So may he give it to us. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.