

Preparing the Next Generation

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Date: 29 December 2013

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now together to the book of Psalms, in the Old Testament, in the book of Psalms. We're going to read a passage from Psalm 78, and then we'll look at something of the meaning of these words for today's service.

That's Psalm 78, that's on page 586 in the Church Bibles, and we'll read verses 1 to 7.

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching. Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable.

I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell them to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them.

[1 : 08] The children get unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

Now the background to this psalm is a very sad one. It's a background of disobedience, and rebelliousness, and unfaithfulness on the part of Israel as God's covenant people.

They had been given directions from God as to how to live, directions as to how to be faithful to himself, how he was to be their God exclusively, but they departed from that, and did so many times in so many different ways.

And indeed that is really what's taken up in the bulk of the psalm from verse 6 right through to the end of the psalm. Asaph, the writer of the psalm, gives a history of the rebelliousness and the disobedience of the people who are called by God's name, and also some of the ways in which God turned against them, and brought things on them for that disobedience.

So Asaph, as he writes this psalm, is not just dealing with history. He is dealing with history, but not just history for the sake of history. What his aim and purpose is, is that history will not repeat itself.

[2 : 40] At least not in the sense in which these previous generations repeated the same mistakes as they carried on their disobedience against the Lord.

What he is aiming for is that history will repeat itself in years to come, in generation after generation, passing on the things of faithfulness to God, devotion to God, the meaningfulness of life lived in obedience to God, that that is what will be passed on.

And that's why he is now passing these things on to the generation he belongs to, and to the one immediately coming. That's what he is saying, isn't it, in verse 6 there.

That's the commandment God gave, and that's what he is trying now to set out, that the next generation might know these things, the testimony and the law of God, the great things that God has done, and that even children yet unborn should arise and tell them to their children.

In other words, he is seeking a repetition or a cycle of repeated passing on of the things of God from one generation to the next, to actually interrupt the flow of disobedience that he is drawing from the history of the people.

[4 : 03] And that's a very meaningful context in which to set a service of baptism today for ourselves. Because that, by and large, is what we are.

We are a covenant people of God. We are brought together in the providence of God, and by virtue of our own baptism, if we've been baptized, into a people who are recognized as the visible church of God in the world, the covenant people of God in the world, with whom God has made a covenant in the gospel.

And it is our responsibility, not only to live out what our baptism signifies to us, that is, our obedience personally to God, but it's also our responsibility to pass these things of God to the next generation, with the aim and purpose that they will pass to the generation following them.

So there are two things in these verses that I want to just focus briefly on. There is firstly divine revelation, God's revelation of himself, how he has come to reveal himself to us, in his law and testimony, which we would say today is the gospel.

But there's also parental responsibility. What arises from these verses is that as parents of children, all who have the privilege of having children to rear in this world, must do so for the Lord, and must do so with the aim of establishing them in the things of God, so that they will pass on.

[5 : 45] These things to their own children after them. Let's look at this divine revelation, first of all, as it comes from these, from different parts of the teaching in the first seven verses.

First of all, he begins with a call to pay attention. That's really what the opening words, or the sound of the psalm is. Give ear, O my people.

Asaph is about to actually set out things that are crucially important for the understanding of these people. He wants an interruption to the disobedience and the rebelliousness of previous generations.

So before he says anything else, he says, pay attention. Because that's after all, one of the great faults of the previous generations that he's recounting in the history and the rest of the psalm.

One of the great flaws and the great faults of these generations is that they did not listen to God. We've been looking recently at portraits of kings in 2 Chronicles.

[6 : 49] And remember the last portrait we saw last time in the final chapter of the book of 2 Chronicles. Repeated what had been in the previous chapters with regard to this point.

That God sent to the people messengers, prophets, and others who were specifically appointed by God to deliver his word to them.

But they despised them. They mocked them. They ridiculed them. They passed it off as if it was unimportant or insignificant. Other voices were far more attractive.

And as you look at all these empty seats today, nothing's changed. Other voices are far more attractive to people in general than the voice of God, than the teaching that God gives through the gospel.

But that's what the psalmist is doing. That is what Asaph is doing, beginning the psalm the way he does. He really wants to get the people's attention before he says anything. And when God has something really important to say to us, and of course the whole Bible is important, but there are teachings in it and doctrines in it that are super important if you like, that are made so clear to us because they are vital for our own relationship with God.

[8 : 15] God actually introduces these things very often with the word behold or something like this, give ear oh my people, pay attention to me.

It's not about who's preaching the gospel. It's not about the kind of minister any church has. It's the fact that God is addressing us, that God is speaking to us through his word.

It's one thing not to pay attention to a minister and that's not surprising because many times we're not that capable of making things interesting.

But it's another thing to turn your ear away from the voice of God. And that's what the gospel is. It is God addressing your soul and mine through his word.

Pay attention my people. I will open my mouth in a parable Asaph is saying I will utter dark sayings from of old. Now we don't need to go into the meaning of the words parable and dark sayings.

[9 : 21] What is what is what meant by that is that Asaph's teaching something like the parables of Jesus in the New Testament is designed to make things clear.

And the dark sayings from of old are things which are generally riddles things which are difficult to understand perhaps until further light is shed upon them. Or you could even take it into the meaning of the difficult things or the dark things of life.

Things which are hard to understand. Where do you get light on these difficulties? Where do you actually find them opened up meaningfully? Well God is saying I can do that for you if you listen to me.

But it all comes down to our acceptance of what God is saying. I will open my mouth in a parable I will utter dark sayings from abode.

In other words the things that have been passed on to them by previous generations maybe it's because they've actually forgotten them and need them explained all over again but a such purpose is that he will illuminate their minds that he will bring things out clearly and cogently so that they can give the maximum attention to it and have it in their understanding.

[10 : 37] God in the Bible his purpose is not to confuse us. Some people think that's really what the Bible is like.

It's just a confusing book. It's a book that is so difficult to understand. There's really little point in trying to understand it because the things it contains are so profound and there are dark sayings in it, there are mysteries in it, there are things which really seem to be beyond our capacity to put together.

And of course that's in many respects what our own heart prefers to think about the Bible. And that's what many people will try to persuade you of.

But God's purpose in giving us this word is not to confuse, it's to communicate himself to us, it's to make himself known to us, it's to bring to us this revelation of himself which we can then ponder and we can then receive and we can then live by.

That's his purpose in the Bible, that's the purpose of scripture, that's the purpose of our coming to hear the word of God preached and to study it for ourselves because we want God in communicating to us to more and more give us an understanding of the meaning and the meaningfulness of this word that he has given us.

[12 : 07] That's why it's our responsibility to pass this on to our children. As a covenant people of God, those who have children have the responsibility and the privilege of teaching their children these things of God and the content of what we teach us there in verse 4.

What we will not hide from them, these things of God, but we will tell it to the coming generation, the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might and the wonders that he has done.

When you read in the Bible these words, the glorious deeds of the Lord, the wonders that he has done, what that means, mostly in the Bible, are the great acts of redemption that God has performed, which sometimes involve miracles, many often, very often involve miracles, the passing of the people, through the Red Sea, having been delivered from Egypt.

That's a great wonder and a work of God, but it's redemptive, it has the theology of salvation built into it. And you work through the Bible and all of these wonders that are recorded, till you come to the wonder of wonders.

You see an infant in a cradle in Bethlehem. You see God having taken on human nature. You see that child coming and growing to be the most remarkable man who ever lived.

[13 : 34] Jesus Christ. You see him coming to give himself in his love for his people to the death of the cross. To die for our sins.

To take the penalty of our sins. To take what we deserve, the death we deserve to die spiritually. Remember the cross of Jesus is not just a physical thing.

It's not just him dying physically. It's taking our sin and its penalty and everything we deserve. It's taking in other words our hell that we deserve into himself and on to himself.

That's the wonder of God in his redemption. The wonders, the glorious deeds of the Lord. Then you have the resurrection of Christ on the dead.

What's more glorious than to find the grave completely and utterly destroyed and vanquished and overcome? Can you do that yourself?

[14 : 35] Can I do that myself? Can we come to death brazenly and say I don't need to fear you because I have in myself the power to rise above you?

Of course you can't. But Jesus did. I am the resurrection and the life he said as he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

A demonstration that he in himself had the power and has the power to overcome death, to defeat death which is the wages of sin. And today he stands or sits triumphantly above death.

Death is below his feet. He's conquered it. The great works of God. That's what we teach our children. That's why they're covenant children.

We pass on these great things to them. What they make of them will be their responsibility. They may never come to follow in the ways of the Lord. That sometimes happens.

[15 : 43] But we pass it on to them. we do so in a way that seeks to convince them, though ultimately only God can, that being in covenant with God personally is the greatest privilege anyone can have.

Because that's how you meet the difficulties of life and of death. So there is what they pass on to the children. But he goes on to speak about the testimony and the law in verse 5 that he has appointed in Jacob.

God revealed himself through his testimony and his law as it's described. In other words, the word that they had in the Old Testament right up to the time of the coming of Christ was largely to, well it's what we have in the Old Testament now of course, but it's summarized here as a testimony and a law.

In other words, there are two sides to it as far as Asaph is concerned. There's the element of testimony. What's a testimony? It's a personal reflection and a personal unfolding or telling out of one's personal experience.

Everyone here is a testimony. A testimony as to what has been the case in your life up to now. It doesn't matter whether we're converted or otherwise Christians or otherwise professing Christians or otherwise but in one way or another we all have a testimony.

[17 : 12] Our life is a testimony. Our life's experience is a testimony. But what Asaph is saying is that God too has a testimony. God has a testimony to himself.

God has been pleased to give us the testimony of himself in his word. And the great thing is that God's testimony isn't just clear and cogent and put together in a way that's well structured.

God's testimony is reliable. There are many people's testimony sometimes even in a court of law that proves to be unreliable even under oath.

That's because we're human, flawed. God's testimony is always absolutely reliable.

You can trust your soul and your eternity to the word of God because it is God's reliable testimony. That's what we teach our children in their covenant situation.

[18 : 24] We pass on to them the reliability of the Bible. We pass on to them the fact that this word will always prove true to them whatever people will say otherwise in any given generation.

And it is also the law that he has appointed. Now that means, yes, it's a rule, it is a law in the way we normally understand it, but the Bible using this word in the Old Testament very often has also the idea of teaching or direction or leading.

So that although it is a law, in other words, there's commandment built into the word, and there are some specific commandments, as you well know, and they're summarized in the Ten Commandments, these are given by God, not just so that he'll say, this is my law, now keep it.

Well, he is saying that, but he's also saying, this is my law, and it's for your instruction, and it's for your development as a human being as you should develop, and it's for your direction, and it's for your understanding, and it's to bring you into a right relationship with me.

It's not a bare commandment, it's a commandment designed specially for our needs, a commandment designed to instruct us, to shape our lives, to actually direct and lead us.

[19 : 55] And you know, this is one of the terrible things that people who want to dismiss the Bible from human life, and the secularist agenda of our day in different ways as it's presented to us, that's really what it's saying.

People should really have no use for the Bible anymore in their lives. It's outmoded, it's not in any way relevant anymore to life in this century. And certainly it should disappear from public life, whatever people do with it personally, it's up to them, but for public life, get rid of it.

It's enough that people should love one another. Well, the point is, you can't love without law. Law is required by love.

Love needs to be based on something other than itself. And to give our children a sense of security, you don't actually rear them by saying, well, to love you will be enough, let's not deal with commandments or regulations or laws or boundaries.

Children and adults alike need to know the boundaries, need to know the distinction between right and wrong, between what is immoral and what is morally acceptable.

[21 : 16] Where do you find that? In the law of God, God, in the instruction book of God. That's why it's so important to retain the Bible in personal and public life, because that's where God has given a testimony and the law.

So that as people know the boundaries, they know what it is to be secure within them. And you'll always find a sense of insecurity with people who've rejected the Bible.

They don't know where the boundaries are for human morality, for human life. That's the advantage we have, that we know where it is in accordance with God's truth.

Love needs law. And law is designed not only to be a sister to love, but an assistant to love, but also very basic to it.

It provides for us a sense of security, knowing what God's will for us really is. And that's why there's a sense of, there's a parental responsibility in this as well.

[22 : 30] We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation. And verse three, he has also himself received this, something similar to what Paul says, to Timothy.

In this letter to Timothy, the second letter in the first chapter, Paul is saying to Timothy, the faith which now is found in you, was found firstly in your grandmother, and also in your mother after her.

So there's Timothy, the third generation of Christians or believers in his own family, having had it passed on to him, the teachings of God from his mother, who had that passed on to her from her mother.

That's what Asaph is aiming at, that's what we are aiming at, that's what parental responsibility in regard to these things is about. We will not hide them from the present generation, we will pass them on to the generation to come, so that they will pass it on to the following one.

You know what it's like when you see the Olympic torch, or the torch for the Commonwealth Games, which will be next year, God willing, in Glasgow.

[23 : 45] The original flame lights the torch or the baton that's then carried to different places until the games begin, when the main cauldron is lit in the stadium.

But you can see that from the original flame, which lights the torch that's then carried around, that torch is passed on one person to another in different relays in different countries, all the way through to the time the games begin.

And you can think of what Asaph is doing here in a spiritual sense is really similar to that. God has lit the flame in our own hearts. He has given us the knowledge of himself.

He has given us this record. He has given us personally also we trust a personal relationship with him savingly to our own salvation. And as he has done that, he has said, here is the torch, I am lighting it from the flame that's in myself in Jesus Christ, and it's lit your life.

And you have to pass it on. You have to pass the baton on. And all the way through, the aim and purpose of the Christian church, the Christian life, is to pass the baton on until the games begin, until Christ returns.

[25 : 02] Why do we want our children baptized? Some may give different reasons to that.

But our response is, it's not for superstition. It's not out of a bare sense that somehow or other it's an appropriate thing to do.

It's just what's done when you belong to the church openly on in the widest sense. And therefore it's somehow appropriate that our children come to be baptized. We baptize our children because we want them to be themselves meaningfully a part of that covenant community and because we want their baptism to signify to them what we are passing on to them by way of our instruction.

The things of God, the forgiveness that is in Christ, the salvation that God has provided in his wondrous works in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every time we're at a baptism we reflect upon its meaning for ourselves.

Am I really today what baptism signifies to me? Baptism itself does not make a person a Christian. Baptism is not administered just to people who can give such an account of themselves that 100% were persuaded they are Christians.

[26 : 34] Baptism is an ordinance that God has given to his church in this world for the visible admission of people into his covenant community.

And as they are baptized and received into that covenant community, it becomes the responsibility of the parent, but not just of the parent, of the church community itself as well as they belong to, to teach them, to instruct them in the things of God.

Why do we have Sunday school? Why do we have ABC clubs? Why do we have Point to Life? Because we want to bring the things of God before our children, not to force them upon them, not to actually in some way or other beat them into a submission to these things of God's truth, but to bring lovingly and patiently and prayerfully and meaningfully and with a conviction from ourselves that will not hide these things from our children, but tell them, these are the things that are precious, my child, above everything else.

The things that God has provided in salvation. they are part, the children, if you like, they are part of the relay already.

Some people say that our children are the church of the future. We know what they mean by that. What they mean is when we are gone, we are hoping that the children now brought up in the church will be the church then when we are no longer here.

[28 : 15] And that is of course a perfectly proper aspiration and prayer to have, but strictly speaking the children are not the church of the future, full stop. They belong to the church of the present.

And they have to be taught in the church of the present as already belonging to it in the visible sense. Whatever they make of it, as we said before, will indeed be their own responsibility.

But then there is also the purpose and meaning to all of this in the three things you find there in verse 7. So that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep his commandments.

It is not simply a matter of being baptized or receiving baptism or teaching children outwardly. faith in God.

It is not the aim that they should set their hope in God. And of course, the proper starting point for that is not simply in our teaching of them from the Bible's teaching.

[29 : 37] The proper starting point for that is that we ourselves have put our trust in God. that we show to them in our manner of life, in how we live, that that is what a Christian really is about.

And if we have not set our hope in God, this really means what it basically means is to put our trust in God, to commit our life to him. And if we haven't done that, then we are not giving our children the best starting point.

Yes, we can bring them to church. Yes, we can teach them the Bible at home. Yes, we can have them go to Sunday school, go to other clubs. All of these things are brilliant. All of these things are great.

But there is no substitute for teaching from your own personal experience of what it is to know the Lord. To explain to them as best you can, this is what the Lord has done for me, my child.

And this is what I want him to do for you. This is what I want you to consider as you see it in my life. Now, none of us is in any sense perfect.

[30 : 54] We're not going to be able to show our children a perfect Christian life, but we know that there is one, or a perfect human life, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

love. And above all things, we bring them to him. To set their hope in God, not to forget the works of God. The positive is emphasized in that too.

To remember the works of God, to actually set them out in their own lives by keeping of them and continuing to love him and serve him.

And to keep his commandments and loving obedience. things. And the three things really are things that we pray for. You remember how, as we read in Ephesians, Paul instructed fathers particularly not to provoke their children to wrath.

In other words, to deal with them not in a way that set them against God or against the gospel, but actually to bring them up in the nurture and admonition, in the nurture and training of the Lord.

[32 : 07] And that's what Asaph in Psalm 78 is really about. That's his aim, that those coming generations will actually be obedient, lovingly to God.

Friends, today I put it to you say that our world needs such parents, and our world needs such children, and it will make the greatest difference if the coming generations of those who presently are the church of God in the world will serve him with a whole heart in days to come.

May he bless his word to us. I don't want to say too much more at this time, I feel that we've already covered enough of the teaching from Psalm 78 already this morning, but just to remind ourselves that we as participants today in the service and as those who observe the sacrament of baptism are being called by God to consider our own relationship to him and also our relationship to this child and to this family that she belongs to, so that we will ourselves do what used to be called improve our baptism, that is, use it positively so that our relationship with God is examined and improved and worked at, but also that we give the support spiritually and in other ways that we pledge to all who belong to the covenant community of God.

I'm going to ask David now if he will take and please and a number of questions to put. You can please stand. please stand.

Do you acknowledge God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, as the only true God and you, God? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and men?

[34 : 25] Do you now promise to bring up this child in the knowledge and admonition of the Lord? Would you please be standing for prayer and please remain standing.

Our gracious God, we thank you for all the ordinances you have given to your church. We thank you now for this ordinance of baptism whereby we have signified to us our own relation with you in covenant, particularly that of your own people who are engrafted and who are united to you.

We thank you too that the outward application of water signifies to us the washing of our sins. And as we confess our sin before you, we ask, O Lord, that each of us here today will know that washing of forgiveness for ourselves.

We will know the work of your Holy Spirit within us and directing our lives as you people. We ask your blessing especially for David and for Annas, for their family at this time, for Lucas and for Annie.

Lord, we ask that you would bless them as they come at this time to present Annie for baptism. We thank you for her, for her place in the world, for the way in which you have brought her into the life of your church.

[35 : 55] We pray that this will be blessed to herself in years to come. We ask that you would bless us as a congregation. Help us, Lord, to be thankful that not only are we a covenant community who confess your name, but that we also find others added to it from time to time.

Be with us, we pray now. Hear us in our prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen. Annie Elizabeth Smith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God.

May God bless you and keep you. May God make a space to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May God lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

We thank you, Lord our God, for all that has been done in your name by word and sacrament today. We pray your blessing now to follow. We ask all of these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.