

Passing the Baton of Truth

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[0 : 00] Lord, Psalm 78. The second passage, we read Psalm 78, and we're going especially at verses 4 to 8, that first part of the psalm.

We will not hide them from their children, but will tell 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, and that the next generation might know them, the children yet 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, and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast.

Well, when the Bible gives us history, accounts of events that we can take as history, not only does it give us history in a way that you can say is actually truthful, but it also presents history as truth with a purpose.

History is never in the Bible just throwing a set of dates at us. Maybe that's what we felt history was like when we went through school, or whenever we think about history, and I suppose if you had a bad experience of being taught history by someone who just threw dates at you, things like that, then you would think, well, history is not really for me.

The Bible presents history to us as history with a purpose, as God's truth worked through in the lives of people with a specific purpose, and sometimes it divides that purpose up into smaller units, if you like, of purpose, such as you have in our account tonight.

[1 : 56] When you look at the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, for example, there is truth, there is history with a purpose, because 1 and 2 Chronicles were actually written to encourage the generation that came back from the exile in Babylon.

They were not written at the time of the history that they record, going through all the various series of kings and so on in Israel and in Judah.

It was written later on so that it took account of these historical events with the purpose of encouraging and teaching and guiding those who had come back from that long exile of 70 years in Babylon.

And again and again you find that that's how the Bible presents history to us. And inevitably the Bible consistently, by presenting us with history the way it does, with the truth of God in history the way it does, leads to the words and the works of God himself.

And indeed the will of God as you find here, for example, there it is in verse 4. We will not hide them from their children, these things that we have heard and that we have known, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord.

[3 : 14] And so that's the specific purpose of this history that is given to the people of Israel in this psalm of Asaph, a maschil of Asaph, as you find in the title.

And the specific purpose here is that we will actually pass on to the succeeding generation with a view to them teaching the following generation after them.

And so it goes on. Generation after generation, as God has given us this truth, as we pass it on to the next generation, it's with a prayer and with a hope that they will do what we're doing for them. And so the thing keeps going. And that's what God presented to Israel as the purpose of history, recounted to them as his truth in action. In other words, we see that the way that we pass on God's truth to those who are coming after us, as well as ourselves as we discuss it together, the way that we pass on the truth of God is by our teaching of it.

We don't just say this is, in fact, what God has said, as you heard in both prayers tonight. Our prayer is that God would use us and use our lives as a vehicle for presenting his truth to the

generation we belong to, to the generation that's coming after us.

[4 : 34] That is a purpose that we take into account as we look at our own lives and why we're in the world, why we're a church, why we follow the Lord, why we confess Jesus Christ, why we actually believe in the gospel.

And two things from this passage tonight. Firstly, that truth has been given to us so that we teach it. Truth has been given to us so that we teach it.

And secondly, that we teach truth so that it leads to trust in God. That's what we pray for. That's the purpose, the reason why we teach God's truth, as it has been given to us.

Truth is given to us so that we teach it. Now, there you find it throughout the psalm here in chapter, in verse four of the chapter. We will not hide them from our children, from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord.

Verse five, he established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children. So there's a consistent emphasis on teaching the children, but there's specific words used to describe the truth that he has given to us, that gave it to them and given to us to convey to our children.

[5 : 52] Look at these words, established and appointed. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel. And the emphasis with both is God has done this.

And that really is one of the key problems. I don't need to tell you this, but we need to keep reminding ourselves in terms of what we need to convey to the generation we belong to, that by and large, this is really one of the key problems today.

One of the things that we lack today is that we lack this truth of God as our standard for individual life, for community life, for all kinds of human activities and human values.

We lack, we've left behind this objective standard, this unchangeable standard of God's truth, because what God has actually established here is his truth.

This is standard for human life. This was not just for Israel in those days. The Bible makes it clear that God's truth is one truth, and it's truth for every generation of all types and backgrounds of human beings.

[7 : 04] Because we've come to the point where, by and large, in our society, truth is not seen as something objective, and certainly not seen as something that has been given objectively by God, by which we say, well, this is recognizable truth.

This is from God. This is something I can actually see and attest to that God has given us. It's not like that. Mostly, you now find truth if it's spoken of as truth at all.

Truth is something fluid, something malleable, something that moves around as one generation follows another. Truth is something defined by the individual's choice.

Truth is something that has ceased to be objective, and certainly ceased to be something that's defined by the fact that's given by God, and a divine truth.

Truth is what you make of it as an individual. And we're told nobody really has the right to tell you what truth is for you. You just follow truth as you see it. It's truth for you, even if it's not truth for anybody else.

[8 : 09] And that, of course, affects relationships. It affects our view of so many things in human society, all the way through from individual models to relationships and so on.

The more you find truth defined in a different way to what the Bible sets out, as God's truth, these are the things you're left with. So it's God-given truth that we have a responsibility to teach and to pass on this baton of God's truth to the succeeding generation.

Secondly, it's God-centered truth. The truth that God has given us to pass on and to teach is God-centered truth. And that brings us to these two words there in verse 5.

He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel. As you know, the Bible has different words for God's truth, even for the word of God itself.

All you've got to do is go through Psalm 119, and you'll find all these different words used for what is effectively God's word or God's revelation of himself. There's a word, the word word is used, testimony, the statutes, all of these different words are used.

[9 : 26] And here you find a testimony and a law. And a testimony, as you know, is something that a witness presents as the truth.

When you find somebody stepping in to give evidence in court, they take an oath that they will tell the truth, that what they actually say will be truthful, that it'll be the truth as they know it and have

experienced it.

And when you come to the Bible, when you come to faith in Christ and faith and trust in God, this comes to be your view of the Bible. This is God's testimony to himself.

And this is why we pray that God will actually bring people to faith, because until you come to faith and you come to know God as to who he is and what this word of God, this Bible is about, you're not going to be able or willing to accept it as truth for you.

But the moment you come to give your life to Christ, the moment by God's grace you come to embrace the truth as it is in Jesus, then this Bible comes to be God's testimony.

[10:37] It's God's witness to himself. There is, as theologians used to call it, a self-authenticating element to the Bible.

That means it speaks for itself, or God speaks through it for himself. Remember, last Lord's Day, we were looking at John 9.

Welcome back, God willing to finish off that, this coming Lord's Day. But remember in chapter 8 of John, that Jesus spoke of himself as the light of the world.

And the Pharisee said to him, you are bearing witness about yourself. Your testimony is not true. How did Jesus answer that? Well, very interesting.

He said, even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true. For I know where I came from and where I'm going. You judge according to the flesh.

[11:33] I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true. For it is not I alone who judge, but I am the Father who sent me.

In your law, it is written that the testimony of two men is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself. And the Father who sent me bears witness about me.

See, there is Jesus saying to the Pharisees, you have before you in my person, the testimony that God is giving of himself. They of course refused to accept that.

They kept rejecting that. They couldn't accept it. This person, this Jesus was actually who he claimed to be. That he was God speaking on behalf of God and as God.

That was their problem. Objective truth stood before them. And then of course, when you go to the interrogation of Jesus by Pilate, you get to that famous verse in John, where Pilate turns around and asks, what is truth to Jesus?

[12:41] As if to just avoid any responsibility for what he was going to do with Jesus. And that's sadly what you find today. But this is in fact, how God, the truth that God has given us is God centered truth.

It's God, truth that God's in God's testimony to himself. It's self-authenticating. It's verifiable. As far as God is concerned, this is his testimony.

That's where I said, as we said, we pray that God will bring people to faith. It's only by bringing people to faith that they're going to come to see this Bible as God's testimony to himself.

But this is what the Psalmist Asaph, what Asaph was reminding the people of. He established a testimony in Jacob. To the people of Israel, God bore witness to himself.

He did that in various ways. He spoke through the prophets. Sometimes he spoke audibly to the likes of Moses who passed on what he heard to the people. Sometimes it was through his great acts of wonder that the Psalmist, as we'll see, goes on to speak about.

[13:50] But all of that is so that he might display his might and his works of wonder. In verse four there, the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might and the wonders that he has done.

Which leads you to what's really, in a sense, a wonderful emphasis there in verse four. The praiseworthy acts, the glorious deeds, it's translated there, and the wonders that he has done. Praises is what the AV has. Here you've got deeds of the Lord. And really, the sense of it is both. It is the deeds that are praiseworthy.

And that's why we owe it to God to praise him, because we've come to receive his testimony to himself and what he has done. And where is the greatest testimony to himself? Well, you have it in the whole Bible.

You have it in the person of Jesus. You have it in the work of the spirit in your heart. Where he has borne testimony to himself. That this is what his truth is and what it's about.

[14:54] He's given us this truth to teach unto others, to teach this truth. God-given truth, this God-centered truth. And against what you actually find so often in the objections that are brought against the Bible, this truth of God has certainty and clarity about it.

There's no uncertainty or lack of clarity in the things that are essential for us to know. And of course, that's not suggesting for a moment there aren't deep things in the Bible that are difficult to actually understand or get to the bottom of.

But every single thing that you need to know the will of God for your salvation, it is clear and it is certain in the way it's presented in Bible as God's testimony to himself.

He has established a witness, a testimony, but he went on to say also a law. He appointed a law in Israel. Because God doesn't just present us with this word of his truth, this truth as a testimony and say, this is my witness to myself.

That's what it is, as we've been saying. But it also has this element of law about it. And the law aspect of God's truth is just as important as the promissory aspect of it.

[16:18] Because when you come to know the Lord again, how do you come to know your own sins for what they are? Not just by studying the promises of God, not just by looking at God's testimony to himself and being convinced it's his witness.

You come to realize this law is showing you up. This law is actually finding fault with you. This law is bringing up your shortcomings. This law is highlighting your sin.

This law really shows you your fallenness and the standard that God expects and requires, but that we cannot keep. And it brings us therefore to Jesus, who has done that and has done that for us, that we could not do ourselves.

And so it's God-centered truth, both in terms of testimony and also in law. But the third thing about this truth that's given to us to teach is that it's church-taught truth.

It's church-taught truth. Look at verses 5 and 6 there from the middle of verse 6. He commanded our fathers to teach to their children so that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children.

[17:37] And that's what we said at the beginning. This is to be church-taught truth. And things, of course, have moved on since the Old Testament. You don't have in Israel in those days the kind of distinction that we now make between church and state, between civil authority or civil government and church government, which are distinguished much more since the days of the New Testament.

But there is such a wonderful emphasis, nevertheless, in what you find in Israel in those times, because without that distinction made so severely sometimes in our society, you actually find that the whole of this covenant people of God, the people of Israel, Judah, they themselves are the church of the day, and they themselves are the ones that are responsible to teach the truth of God among themselves, but also to bear testimony to it among the nations, to the surrounding pagan nations.

God actually gave his truth to Israel to convey beyond themselves, as well as to teach each other. And there is no personal opt-out, in other words.

And if only we could just capture something more of that for our own day as well, because the unity that's here, there's no distinction so that you have the onus for one thing upon families, the onus for another thing upon the religious authorities or whatever.

The whole people, as a covenant people, have their responsibilities defined by God. And the passing on of his truth is something that has to be taken account of and for which every age, if you like, in society, especially those of adult age, are responsible to pass on.

[19:34] There's no opt-out there for parents to say, well, this is the responsibility of the priest. I don't need to actually teach my children. That's not what we read. And in the likes of Deuteronomy, chapter 6, chapter 4, has a similar emphasis there.

And the serious point here in the psalm, or one of the serious points, is that it combines not hiding the truth with telling the truth.

That they might not actually hide this truth, that they might actually tell it forth or make it clear. And the serious point, of course, in that, or one of the serious points, is that when we fail to teach the truth, actually teach the truth to our own generation, what really is happening there is we're actually hiding the truth from them.

And it's a hugely serious issue to hide the truth of God from anyone. And, you know, if we're not ourselves, as we heard prayed for tonight, earnestly seeking that God would use us, that God would take us and make us vehicles for his truth, then in a sense that's hiding the truth from our generation.

Not telling it forth is equivalent to actually burying it or hiding it. And that affects me. It affects you. It's something that God brings to our heart and conscience.

[21 : 00] It doesn't matter whether we're in the pulpit as preachers of the gospel or yourselves as in everyday life testifying to the gospel. As far as this is concerned, it amounts to the same thing.

Our lives, our manner of life, are to be vehicles for the truth of God. He has given us that truth as God-given truth and God-centered truth and to be church-taught truth.

And it's so comprehensive, as Deuteronomy 6 reminded us when we read Deuteronomy 6 a minute ago. You recall there how it actually says, you shall bind them as a sign on your hand.

You shall teach them diligently to your children and talk of them. When you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise, you write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

And all the way through there, you see how comprehensive the teaching element was to be in every aspect of life. God's truth was to be central.

[22 : 03] And it was a truth church-taught by every responsible adult, especially within it. That's why we make it a diligence and take time over this, friends, because one of the beauties and the benefits, for example, of the Lord's Day is that it gives us that opportunity to relate to God's truth for ourselves and to be able to take time over how we actually then convey that truth, how we live out that truth, how we come to teach that truth to our generation.

And one of the great things that you find in Christian charity activity, such as, for example, Road to Recovery itself, other similar charities and works that are being done in our own locality and beyond, the beauty about these organizations is this, that they are actually basing their activity on God's objective truth.

And, of course, praying that the objective truth that they base their activities on will come to be received and accepted as they live it out themselves as leaders of these movements and these activities, that those who are under their care and in need of guidance and teaching and support will come, more than anything else, to accept this truth for themselves and come to see this as God's testimony and God's law and God's statutes, God's truth.

And so that's the first thing. Then I'm just going to hurry through the next part. Truth is given to us so that we teach it and we teach it. Secondly, we teach it so that it leads to trust.

There are three elements. There are related elements in verse 7 so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep his commandments.

[24 : 06] There's reliance, first of all, then remembrance and then obedience. And they're all tied together. We teach truth so that, by God's blessing, it leads to trust on the part of those who receive it as we convey it.

So that they be a dedicated generation and a different generation. These are the two elements we might say in summary of what follows. Contrasting them with what he calls their fathers who were not steadfast, whose heart was not right with God.

And we want our rising generation, by God's blessing, to be unlike their fathers, to be unlike this present generation where our Christian witness is sadly so small, even though we may do our very best, as I know you're doing, but you still see it against that massive darkness in which we live.

And this man was teaching his own people the truth of God, to pass it on to the next generation so that they might be a dedicated generation, that they might make their, should set their hope in God, that they should rely upon God specifically, that they should remember and not forget the works of God, but keep his command.

What's the best way of remembering God's truth? Well, it's not by just learning it by rote in your head. The best way of remembering God's truth is to actually live it out and teach it.

[25 : 42] Teach it by your way of life. The best way to remember it is to keep it in obedience in your own heart and your own life. And that, in fact, is what is frequently seen throughout the Bible.

James, for example, chapter 1, verses 22 to 25, where he says, be doers of the word and not hearers only, that famous passage. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

For he goes and looks, he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and who perseveres in it, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

So that follows through into the activities of the church itself. How do we remember the death of Jesus and the value we place upon it?

Well, we remember it not just by reading about it, but by obeying God's commandment in regard to it, because that's what it is in the Lord's Supper.

[26 : 55] Do this in remembrance of me. The Lord knew very well how prone these people in Israel were to forget. That's why he warned them, as we read in Deuteronomy.

When you go into that land and you come to actually possess all the things you didn't work for that are going to enhance your lives so much, then be very careful that you do not forget the Lord your God.

Sadly, that's what they did. And we are prone to forgetting the Lord our God. It sounds a terrible thing to do, but I do it every day.

In portions of the day, at least. And I'm sure you have the same confession to make. We actually remember God's truth best by keeping it, by consciously applying it in life and following it through into our witness.

And as you can see here from verse 9 onwards, the rest of the psalm pretty much is an account of how disastrous it was to forget God and not do his truth.

[28 : 04] How disastrous it is to reject the truth of God, to just pay passing reference to it. And the two things that are mentioned there in terms of his prayer that they will be a dedicated generation, but also a different generation to the one that went before them.

The psalm repeats how their sin was so much against the goodness of God. All the way through the psalm, you'll find it's a long psalm, but it's so worthwhile just reading in one go, slowly and just deliberately and studiously.

And you'll see how repeatedly the psalm emphasizes that they sinned against God's kindness, God's goodness, God's patience, God's covenant display of his goodness.

And that's why it's important that we teach history to our generation. Not just secular history, but church history, ecclesiastical history, gospel history.

Because one of the things that we want to convey is that the sinfulness of this present generation is a sinfulness against the goodness of God who has blessed us as a people for generations past with his gospel, with so many things in his favor that have enhanced us and lifted us up as a people in terms of morals and righteousness that we have now cast in his face.

[29 : 39] And that's why we study history. We learn from mistakes. We learn in such a way as we'll not hopefully make the same mistakes again.

We learn so that we know what is valuable and what isn't, what is beneficial and what isn't, what is harmful and what isn't. Because all the way through this psalm, you find the unthankfulness of the people and how their lack of repentance stands out glaringly against the way in which God kept revealing himself to them.

They are so unthankful and yet look at verse 55. I'm just going to close with these few thoughts.

Verse 55, he drove out the nations before them. He apportioned them for a possession and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.

Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High. Though he took them out of Egypt and he took them through the desert and he took them into the land of Canaan and he gave them the benefits of it and the richness of it.

Yet this is how they react. They tested and rebelled against the Most High God. And unrepentant as well.

[30 : 54] There you have it in verse 34, for example. They, yes, they had shocks in their experience.

God sometimes did truly hurt them, shock them. But you find there, when he killed them, they sought him.

They repented and sought God earnestly. They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God, their Redeemer. But they flattered him with their lips.

They lied to him with their tongues. Their heart was not steadfast toward him. They were not faithful to his covenant. So many times in our society, we've seen people coming to think more deeply than usual about things through some providence.

Perhaps this pandemic is, of course, one example. And as we've said so often, we're praying that people will come to really think seriously about life and about eternity and about death and about God.

[31 : 59] Sadly, in the course of history, even the people of Israel, when they came to experience God's wrath, God's displeasure, God's judgment, for a short time, they took note and became somewhat serious, but then they rebelled against him.

At last, their repentance was insincere, such a mark of our own society for too long. We don't want to generalize, of course, but it's obvious to us that that is one of the great characteristics of our age. We are not thankful to God. We don't listen when he calls on us to repent. But you notice verse 70. 70 there to 72.

He chose David as servant and took him from the sheepfolds, from following the nursing ewes. He brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance, with upright heart.

He shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand. Why does the psalm finish on such a positive note? Having gone through verse after verse after verse of speaking about disaster and lack of repentance and ungratefulness, he then comes to speak about David.

[33 : 18] And of course, David is the type of Jesus. And as you look at it with New Testament eyes, and as you apply this to our own situation in the here and now today, you still have to come back and say with thankfulness, yet, but there's still Jesus.

And he's still on his throne. And he's still in command. And he still has the rights and the sovereign rights and the ability, as he always has, to turn things back the way they should be.

And that's why we pray the words of Psalm 79, the following Psalm, and verses 8 and 9. Do not remember against us our former iniquities.

Let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name.

Deliver us and atone for our sins for your name's sake. May God bless these thoughts on his words to us.