

Teaching the Next Generation

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[0 : 0 0] into the book of Psalms and Psalm 78. And we'll read again at verse 5, Psalm 78, and it's on page 586.

Verse 5, 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.

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.

As we saw here, we only read a wee bit of this psalm, but it's a really, really long psalm. And it gives us, really, the history of Israel from the time they came out of Egypt until David is sitting on the throne.

And as you read this psalm, if we had a time to read right through it, and it would be worth your while, because it's a very historical psalm, but one of the things that it highlights for us is just how incredibly slow to learn Israel appeared to be, how incredibly rebellious they were.

[1 : 3 1] Because over and over and over again, they get into predicaments and problems and difficulties, and God delivers them. And yet every time they came to a new problem, a fresh difficulty, they grumbled, they complained, and they rebelled.

And yet over and over and over again, God demonstrates his long-suffering and his mercy and his grace. And, you know, sometimes we can read incidents or episodes like that in the history of God's people, and we can sit in judgment upon them and tut, tut, tut at them and say, well, you know, weren't they an incredible people?

Weren't they so slow to learn? If I had been in the wilderness, I would have been very different. No. I think we would have been just the same. Because when we look at our own lives, is it not true that one of the things that I suppose causes us a great deal of disquiet is how slow we are to learn as well.

And so often we find ourselves going to the Lord and asking God to forgive us for maybe the way that we speak, for maybe the attitudes that we have, for maybe the things that we do, and we say to ourselves, this is not the first time I've done this.

It's not even just the second time. But over and over and over again, we find ourselves going back to the Lord and asking Him to forgive us for our sin.

[3 : 1 1] And that shows us that just like Israel, so are we. But again, one of the great things that this psalm shows us is God's great compassion, great care, and great interest in us.

And this psalm tells us that God is so interested in us that He gave us a testimony and a law. That's what we read in verse 5.

He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel. In other words, God hasn't left us to our shelves. God hasn't said, well, there you are.

I have made you. I have established things. Now, it's up to you. Get on with it. God hasn't done that. Although many people try and live as if that's what God did.

But God has revealed. That's what the Bible is. The Bible is God's revealed will to us. Where God has made known to us all that we need to know about Him.

[4 : 17] And in fact, there is so much in the Bible about Him that we will never even in this world be able to comprehend or understand everything that is said.

Because we do not have the capacity of mind even to lay hold upon what God has revealed to us here. Now, when we look at this particular psalm, verse 5 reminds us of God delivering the law to Israel at Mount Sinai.

And there it was there that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. These Ten Commandments are binding upon every successive generation.

All ten of them. And it's very interesting, though, that if we were to go back to Exodus 20 where the Lord gives the law, that before He gives us this particular testimony and law that we are to obey, that we are to live by, that God, first of all, gives a testimony about Himself.

Before God said to us, you will have no other gods before me, you will not take my name in vain, you will not kill and steal and lie and all these things, before He gave us the testimony and the law.

[5 : 47] He gave a testimony regarding Himself. And the testimony that He gave regarding Himself was this, I am the Lord that brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

So God at the very outset is demonstrating His grace, His redemptive power, He is reminding Israel of what He has done for them.

And because of what He has done for them, He is now saying to them, this is what I want you to do for me. And we must never lose sight of that.

Because that is again how the Lord is speaking to us by His grace. Even today, He is reminding us of what He has done for us. He is the one who has redeemed us.

He is the one who has delivered us. He is the one who has taken us out from the spiritual land of bondage in and through His Son, Jesus Christ.

[6 : 51] That is what we are being reminded of. And the Lord is saying, follow my ways, follow my statutes, and your life will be enriched.

And that is one of the things we need to learn. Because there is within us, and if anybody ever questions and says, am I a sinner? Just look at your life and see how defiant you are, how defiant I am against God's way and law.

somehow we think that we can make a better job by doing our own thing. There is an awful danger within our own hearts and minds of trying to go through life on our own.

And the Lord says, I haven't given you these laws to make life a burden and to make it difficult for you. I have given you these laws in order to give you liberty and freedom.

This is the way of liberty. This is the way of freedom. All other ways ultimately enslave and chain and bog you down and bind you down.

[8 : 09] You may think for a wee while that you have liberty and freedom, but you don't. And it's one of the most important discoveries that we can make is to discover that the freedom sometimes we thought we had we most certainly did not.

That we are chained and enslaved unless Christ will set us free. And that's one of the great things that Jesus is always promising. He says, I'll give you liberty.

I'll give you freedom. And freedom, as you and I know, is one of the most precious things that we can enjoy in life. Liberty, freedom. We hate being shackled.

We hate being hemmed in. People want that freedom. And yet people are always looking for this liberty and freedom away from Christ. And so we need to get back to understand what the Lord is actually saying to us.

Now, of course, God has sent the Son, Jesus Christ, into this world to save us. And he has done that for us and for his own glory.

[9 : 18] You see, this is part of the Lord takes glory to himself. Not that we, we mentioned this a week or two ago, we cannot add to the glory of God. We cannot detract from his glory. He's altogether glorious within himself. But we, in Christ, display his glory in the very same way as the heavens display, the heavens display the glory of God.

God. That's what we read about in the Psalms. And that is why we are here. And so the Lord is saying, I have done everything for you. Now, this is what I want you to do for me.

Now, you'll see here that while God established this testimony and this law, he's telling Israel, right, we go back, we can go back in our minds to the time on Mount Sinai.

And God has established this law and this testimony, he's given it to Israel. And that was then, that was a unique time.

[10 : 18] God was speaking to them. But God now puts a responsibility upon each generation. He said, I'm not going to do this, I'm not going to come to each generation.

Each generation is not going to come back to Mount Sinai and I'm going to speak to them there. I'm putting the responsibility, I'm putting the onus upon each generation to tell the next generation to pass on, to declare this testimony.

Commanded each generation, that's what we read about here. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children.

the Lord places great importance upon the teaching of the children in the things of God. I would say that he places greater importance upon the teaching of the children than teaching the children anything else.

The greatest importance is teaching about himself. And if we shy away from that duty, then we're shying away from the worst, we're making the worst decision that we can ever make.

[11 : 48] And I would, I think that when we look around in Scotland or look around in Britain today, that the last generation has failed the rising generation.

Because would you not say that by and large the rising generation is that generation that know very little about God? And you have to go back to the generations and say who, which generation stopped teaching their children?

Because the responsibility you see lies fairly and squarely upon each home, each family, upon the fathers teaching their children.

And if a generation grows up and they know nothing about God, you have to say, well, why don't they know something about God? Who hasn't taught them?

Is it the fathers? In all probability it is. And God takes note of these things. And that's why I say it is the most awful thing that a home can do is to neglect teaching their children about the things of God.

[13 : 12] Precious young souls and yet being abandoned and maybe thinking, well, somebody else can do it, but I am not going to do it.

Well, one day, my friend, we're all going to have to stand before the Lord and give an account of what we have done with all the responsibilities, with all the opportunities, with all the privileges that were given to us, and we're going to be held accountable for these things.

And it's a very, very solemn thing. God saw fit that all the main things in the Old Testament were set out in order for the children to learn.

the two great Old Testament events, the coming out of Egypt, leaving bondage and slavery behind. It was celebrated in the Passover, and the Passover was set out in such a way that the children were going to ask, what does this mean?

And you tell them that this is the Lord's Passover. This is your opportunity to teach them about God's deliverance. promise. The other great moment was the arrival into the land of promise.

[14 : 28] And again this was marked out by the memorial stones taken out of Jordan and placed so that in generations to come the children are going to ask, what are these stones there for?

It's in the same way, you know, you go over, say for instance, to Calanish, and you see these stones, and people are always asking, where did these stones come from? Who put these stones there?

What were these stones? Well, it was different in Israel. There, at the border, as they crossed the Jordan, there were these stones standing.

And the children would ask, and this was up to the parents to instruct them and teach them that the Lord God was mighty. And God said that in his word, this is what I want you to do.

So you can see how important it is to the Lord to instruct and to teach the children, in the way of the Lord. And we see, and just very briefly here, verse 6, it says, which he commanded their fathers to teach their children that the next generation might know them.

[15 : 36] Why are we to teach? Well, I'm just going to, for a minute at each, three things, that the children might know the Lord, that they might know him.

It's important. How can you believe? The Bible says this, how can they believe in him of whom they haven't heard? How can you believe in somebody that you've never heard of?

It's Paul who is teaching us this, and he said, it is so important to go out and to tell people about the Lord Jesus. They can't believe in somebody that they haven't heard of. And it's the same, it's important to teach people, to teach children about the way of the Lord.

It's only through that teaching that they will come to understand and to believe and to know. And the more you come to know, the more you are going to believe, the more you're going to trust, the more you're going to love.

You cannot really trust somebody you don't know anything about. You wouldn't trust somebody. You wouldn't go up to a complete stranger and tell them all your secrets.

[16 : 45] You wouldn't probably said before, you wouldn't go up to a complete stranger or suppose you stop the car in the street and you call the stranger over and say, listen, I can't find anywhere to purchase now.

There's my bank card and there's my PIN number. Can you take some money out for me? You wouldn't do that to a complete stranger. That would be a, you might get off with it, but there's a strong possibility you won't.

But you would, if it was somebody you knew and trusted, you would say, look, I can't get out of the car just now. Can you do that? you act, you do things because of how you know and trust somebody.

And that's how it is with the Lord. The more we come to know him, the more we're likely to trust him. And when we come to know him, as the Bible reveals, it's then that we're likely to trust our whole life to him.

It's like the little boy, remember we mentioned it before, who was stuck on the sea cliff, and he couldn't go down and he couldn't get back up. Anyway, they discovered in the village that he was stuck there.

[17 : 55] Remember how they lowered that rope down and he would not take hold of that rope until his father came. He was shouting, send, get my father. And even although there were strong men at the top holding the rope, he wouldn't take it until his father, he knew his father was at the other end of the rope because of what he knew of his father, he knew he could trust him.

He knew he would not let go. And you know, that's how it is if we are taught a right of the Lord, where we come to see him, where we come to understand, where we come to realize that there is nobody else in all the world, in all the universe that we can trust like him, to give our life to him.

So this is part of what this teaching involves. But we also see that not only is it in order that they might know him, but also hope in him. Verse 7, so that they should set their hope in God.

See, this world is really empty. It's void. There are so many people today, and they've got no hope. You speak to a lot of people. There's not an awful lot of hope around, but there's a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety, a lot of despair, a lot of uncertainty, a lot of people saying, don't know what's going to happen.

A lot of people are worried about this world, it's going to pack in. All people are worried about, there's so many of the foundations and structures that they believed in are showing to be vulnerable and full of faults and failings, and people are worried.

[19 : 35] You know the Bible says for people without God, that they're without hope in this world. I would hate to live my life without hope.

Well, that's the definition of somebody who doesn't have God in this world, that they're without hope. And that's why we are to teach our children about the Lord, because they're going to face many difficulties and problems in life.

And they're going to face heartaches, they're going to face great things, joys and celebrations and many wonderful things, but they're also going to face uncertainties and difficulties.

Are we preparing our children for this world that is out there, with all its anger and frustrations, with all its enmity, and all these things, are we preparing them for these things?

Well, the best way is to prepare them by teaching of the Lord, and that will give them a hope. Because in all the changing world, here's one who never changes.

[20 : 43] Fix your hope upon him. And finally, the last thing we see is that they might obey him, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

Now, as we know that that's what love does, as we come to know the Lord, and we come to hope in the Lord, and believe in the Lord, God, then we in turn seek to obey him.

Because obedience comes out of love. When you love somebody, you want to do that which you know will please them. Isn't that true? If you love somebody, you're not going to spend your life doing the things that you know they hate and object to and hurt them.

That would be absurd. If you love somebody, you do the things that you know they like. And that's what it is for us.

Because here is his word. And because we love him, we must seek to follow that word. And so that is why it's so important to teach your children.

[21 : 53] And the best time to teach them is when they're young. This is the opportunity. And that is why when they're too young themselves to read, you read Bible stories to them.

We give out Bible story books today. When they're old enough to read, make sure they're reading them. Pray for them. When they're old enough, teach them to pray. Bring them then to the creche, bring them to church, bring them to Sunday school, bring them to the youth club, bring them to the youth fellowship, to campaigners, to parent and toddler, to all the different activities that the church provides, but above all, teach them at home.

Set the example before them. Show them that the Lord means a lot to you. Children aren't daft. If they see that the Lord doesn't mean much to you, don't be surprised.

If it won't be long until it's evident that the Lord doesn't mean much to them either. Although the Lord often surprises and works in different ways, but set before them when they're young the ways of the Lord.

Train up a child in the way that he'll go, and when he's old he will not depart from it. Let us pray. Lord our God, we pray to bless us and we give thanks for every good thing given to us.

[23 : 19] May we hear what God the Lord will speak. We pray that thy word will go deep into our heart, that it will affect us for good, and that we might have teachable spirits, and that we might be willing and ready to learn.

Watch over us all, we pray, and grant us thy grace, and forgive us our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.