

Psalm 78:1-72 Tell The Next Generation Falls OPC PM Apr. 11, 2021

A woman took her three children to a diner for breakfast one morning. It was crowded and they had to take separate seats at the counter, individual seats away from each other. Mother on one stool, then a few other people on individual stools, then one child, a few more people, another child, a few other strangers, and then the youngest. Eight-year-old Mary was seated at the far end of the counter and when her food was served to her she called all the way down the counter to her mother in a voice loud enough that her mother could hear, and so obviously loud enough that everyone along the counter could hear, "Mother, don't people say grace in this place?" A hush came over everyone along the counter, along with everyone throughout the entire diner. Before the mother could figure out what to say, the man serving the eaters at the counter said, "Yes, we do say grace, sister. This time, you say it." All the people at the counter bowed their heads. Mary bowed her head and in a clear voice said, "God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food."

Why do I tell you that story at the beginning of a sermon on Psalm 78? Because I want you to imagine the impact that 8 year old girl had in one moment. And then I want you to fast forward and imagine that same 8 year old girl, just 10 years later. Now she is 18. If she was trained in the Bible what greater impact could she have in other places and in other ways?

I want to support our teaching of Children in our church through the Christian Education on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. I want to do so by preaching a sermon from this passage. While I do, you imagine what Mary would do, if she was trained in all that we cover tonight.

Pass it on. We say this phrase "pass it on" when we mean for you to tell the next person. The operator game is when two teams whisper a message from one end of the line, to the other. First person speaks, next must hear. You start as a hearer, then become a teller.

The first word of the Psalm invites you into the cycle. The first word is Hear. What must we hear? We must hear what God tells us through the author Asaph. And once we have listened to God, to Asaph, to our pastors and our parents telling us, we turn around and tell the next generation about our God. What is the format of our teaching? It is history, but how does it come to us? It is not Q and A, like our catechism. It is not a list of attributes of God, like a Christian book. It is not quite a story. Instead, it is history told in the form of parables.

The key word is "parables." Parables are more than just the little stories Jesus told to make his point. A parable places one true story alongside another story, so

that we can learn by comparing the two. Here is how it works, as we read this Psalm, we are supposed to take the stories of God's dealings with His people, and place them alongside the story of our own lives, so we will learn from them. The past is like a tangled riddle that must be interpreted, for us to understand it.

We must tell the next generation the lessons from history about our God – His redeeming works and His merciful character.

Tell of what?

1....of hope in God, not like the previous generations. (v.1-8)

We keep making the mistakes of previous generations. If we will stop and look at Psalms like this, we can be encouraged to stop making such mistakes. Here is the lesson, though, even if we turn out just like all previous generations, God is filled with grace, and will take us home.

Keep on hoping. Consider Romans 15:4, *“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*

This is a history Psalm, but not a backward-looking Psalm. It is a forward looking Psalm. Right away, we must begin to think of the next generation after us. We have to pass it on. We must show how God dealt with previous generations, to the coming generations. We are passing a torch.

Verse 4, we do not hide the parables or stories of God's power.

In verse 5, God commanded our forefathers to tell us, which is how we came to know God. Why? In verse 6, so that the next generation might know the parables, the stories, and how they relate to our lives, so that they will *“arise and tell them to their children.”* The goal? Verse 7 says so that they will hope in God. Not forget the works of God. Keep God's commandments. Not be like their fathers, a bad generation. God called previous generations stubborn and rebellious. Usually it is parents calling kids rebellious. Here, it is great-great-grandchildren calling our forefathers rebellious. Not faithful to God.

2....of the failure of previous generations, yet God's compassion. (v.9-39)

In verses 9, God's people were defeated in battle, because they did not keep God's covenant (v.10), and they forgot God (v.11). They forgot the miracles of Egypt (v.12), and the parting of the Red Sea (v.13). They forgot the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night (v.14). They forgot the rock that gave water in the wilderness (v.15-16).

In verse 17, they sinned still more! In the desert, they rebelled against the Most High. They would not believe God had power to provide food and water, until

God proved it to them! In verse 18, they tested God, and demanded different food than the manna. They spoke against God, doubting whether God was able to even give them food in the wilderness! (v.19) Right after God gave water from a rock, they wondered whether God could give bread or meat there. (v.20).

When the LORD heard about their doubts, He was full of wrath. (v.21). Why? Verse 22, it was specifically because they did not believe in God or God's power.

OKAY, given all that, if you were God, what would you do next?

What did our God do? I'll give you a hint. God rained down something from heaven. What would you rain down from heaven? Verses 23-24 tell us that it was not burning fire from heaven that God rained down. No. God "*rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven.*" God was merciful! Verse 25 tells us God gave them the bread of angels. In verses 26-27, God caused the wind to blow in birds to eat, like chicken, and verse 28 tells us God let the birds fall right into their camp. Verse 29 tells us the people ate and were filled.

In verse 30, God was more concerned about their spiritual walk than their diet of what they ate, and so while they were still eating, the anger of God killed the strong young men. In verse 32, they still would not believe. So, God responded in verse 33 by starting to execute them younger and younger. This got the people's attention, so finally, in verse 34, they allegedly sought God, and repented. In verse 35, they allegedly remembered God was their Rock and Redeemer. Why do I say "allegedly"? Because the sad truth is that they were now involved in trying to deceive God, to get what they wanted. In verses 36-37, they showed that they were faking worship, and faking repentance! They lied to God. Okay, if you were in God's position, what would you do now? In verse 38, God STILL had compassion on them!! God atoned for their iniquity (which points us ahead to the cross, the only source of atonement.) The verb "atoned" is the verb meaning to cover a debt by paying the full price." God sent His Son to die for the debts of God's people in their rebellion and deception. In the mean time, God "*restrained His anger often*" (v.38). God "*did not stir up all His wrath.*" (v.38). God remembered how frail and weak is humanity (v.39). They could not handle God's full anger. God's anger must wait for the cross, and wait it did. And the full weight of His anger was unrestrained on Christ, and God stirred up all His wrath against His only begotten Son unto death.

3....of the rebellion of previous generations, yet God's leading. (v.40-55)

Now we survey the season of history known as the wilderness wanderings. The Lord's people rebelled often, and grieved the LORD. (v.40). They tested The LORD again and again, and provoked Him (v.41). They did not remember God's power, or the day of redemption from Egypt (v.42). Beginning in verse 43, the focus is the plagues of Egypt. What about these ten plagues? Verse 42 says they forgot God's power. What sort of demonstrations did they get – were they forgettable demonstrations of power? Well, let's go back over them from verses 44 - The power

of the Lord to destroy the enemy was shown by 1) water turned to blood 2)frogs 3)gnats 4)flies 5) death of cows 6)boils (sores on the skin of people) 7) hail 8)locusts 9)darkness 10) death of firstborn. To top it all off, verse 52 tells us that God led out His people like sheep (God is the shepherd who rescued), and then that God guided them in the wilderness like a flock.(God is the shepherd who continues to guide).

By verse 54, God had brought them back to the land that is called [God's] holy land. In verse 55, we get a shortened story simply saying, "God drove out the nations before them; God apportioned them for a possession and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents."

They rebelled, and God brought them home. They rebelled again, and God brought them home again. God is the Good Shepherd. Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*" John 10:11.

4...of the testing of the previous generations, yet God's renewed care in giving them a shepherd. (v.56-79)

In verse 56, we see something familiar, and understand the phrase that history repeats itself. God had given them a land and homes, (v.55), and here in 56 we see their response, "*Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies...*"

Verse 57, we see that it was not just a lack of emphasis. They "...QUOTE *turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers; they twisted like a deceitful bow.*"

How? They built worship centers for false religions. Verse 58 says it in OT language, "...*they provoked [God] to anger with their high places (false temples of worship); they moved [God] to jealousy with their idols (false gods)*".

OK, NOW WHAT WOULD YOU DO, IF YOU WERE GOD AND THESE WERE YOUR PEOPLE? HAD ENOUGH OF THEM YET?

Verse 59, "*when God heard (God knows all things all the time, but this is telling us God's response). God's response? "...God was full of wrath, and He utterly rejected Israel...*"

Verse 60, God forsook His extra worship center in Shiloh. In verse 61, God let his ark and His people fall into the hands of the Philistines. In verse 62, God let the people of His heritage feel some of His wrath through abandonment to the sword. In verse 63, fire took so many young men, that there were no weddings for the young women, because there were no young men. In verse 64, even the priests faced violent deaths by sword.

In verse 65, God renewed His own care for His people. It is like a warrior who had wine, and just then the war cry was sounded. That warrior could shout his way through the wine, to get to the duty of battle right away. God had sudden, renewed

and excited commitment to the task of putting things right for His people. In verse 66, God made short work of the enemies.

Now in verses 67 to the end, we get the review of David. God's selection of the tribe of Judah necessarily means other tribes do not have the everlasting throne of David. In verse 69, God had the temple built by King Solomon. Suddenly, our story is over. If the kingship under the first King, King Saul could not last, even though King Saul had strong military power, will the kingship under David last? Rather than answer that question, the Psalmist with much creative artistry, ends the Psalm with three verses (70-72) emphasizing how David got to the throne. David was chosen because he was a shepherd. The only way the nation will last is if God grants a shepherd with an upright heart and skillful hand. Is that David? At the beginning, yes, but by the end? Haven't we seen the lessons of history yet? David failed, but God gave us a good shepherd in the Son of David. Tell the next generation the story of David who failed, and the Son of David who succeeds in shepherding us.

Concluding Application:

Paul saw his obligation to tell the next generation. Look at Romans 1:14-15, *"I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome...."*

What is the gospel? It is the power of God for salvation.

What did they forget in Psalm 78:42? The power of God for salvation.

They forgot the gospel!

Paul never forget the gospel. Paul never forgot the power of God to rescue us.

SI - An author for a magazine wrote how he studied the Amish people in preparation for an article on them. In his observation at the school yard, he noted that the children never screamed or yelled. This amazed him. He spoke to the schoolmaster. He remarked how he had not once heard an Amish child yell, and asked why the schoolmaster thought that was so. The schoolmaster replied, "Well, have you ever heard an Amish adult yell?"

Let me read you a poem that supports Christian Education.

'Twas a sheep, not a lamb, that strayed away in the parable Jesus told.

A grown-up sheep that had gone astray from the ninety and nine in the fold.

Out on the hillside, out in the cold, 'twas a sheep the Good Shepherd sought;

And back to the flock, safe into the fold, 'twas a sheep the Good Shepherd brought.

And why for the sheep should we earnestly long and as earnestly hope and pray?

Because there is danger, if they go wrong, they will lead the lambs astray.

For the lambs will follow the sheep, you know, wherever the sheep may stray;

When the sheep go wrong, it will not be long till the lambs are as wrong as they.

And so with the sheep we earnestly plead, for the sake of the lambs today;

If the sheep are lost, what terrible cost some of the lambs will have to pay!

Remember the gospel! We tell two things – the deeds and words of the Lord. Deeds is the cross, the words are the gospel news about forgiveness because of the cross. The result is the next generation trusting in God.

Celebrate the gospel. The Lord's Supper we celebrate next Sunday evening. It is a time to celebrate. We must feed upon the precious truths of Christ learned at the cross. We respond with victorious lives. Our sense of redemption is close at hand! We refresh our memory.

Pass on the gospel. Like passing a baton in a track race, we deliver the good news to the upcoming young ones. We must make sure our parenting, our leadership, or work on committees, our outreach work, our missionary work, is all reflecting God. What does that mean? Always show mercy in the face of rebellion. Be willing to start over and tell the gospel again from the beginning. How do we do that? We remember the cost of our redemption. If we forget God and God's power, then we have nothing to tell the next generation. His mercy endures forever.