

March 24/25, 2007

## The Importance of Remembering His Story

### Psalm 78

Pastor Dan Moeller

Imagine for a moment with me the following scene: On one side, the army of God, the Israelite army standing at attention led by their supreme or their foremost tribe Ephraim ready to do battle. On the other side is another group, another army ready to do battle. Think about what might be going through their minds and their hearts as they stand ready to fight this army of God, this strange people that seem to have a force behind them that gives them victory. They know the stories. They've heard of this peculiar people that were slaves in Egypt. But their God had worked in mighty ways and now instead of being slaves, they were a free people. How that same God had taken them from Egypt and into the wilderness and led them through there. Who had fed them manna – food from heaven – and brought water from rocks. They would know those stories of this peculiar people.

They also probably knew that this group of people hadn't always lived up to their potential. Sometimes God had to discipline them, but over and over and over again, God had showed Himself to be faithful. And they had come to their Promised Land – the land of Canaan – a place flowing with milk and honey, and had been led by their greatest general Joshua who was of the tribe of Ephraim. And they had gone into that land, and nation after nation after nation had fallen before their army.

But wait, look again at the army. Look again at their lead tribe of Ephraim as they begin to turn away, as they begin to depart, as they begin to go home and never engage in the battle that God had called them to, never had taken their stand as God had wanted them to take their stand. Why? Why would a group of people with so much history with God who had seen God's hand throughout their life as a nation—had seen God's hand so often come to their defense, so often seeing their victory because of His hand behind them—why would Ephraim turn away and go home? Is there a lesson for us? Is there a lesson for us in what it means to raise up the next generation to be ready to take their stand for God?

I invite you to turn with me to the 78<sup>th</sup> Psalm as we look at what happened to this tribe and maybe learn some things for ourselves. Psalm 78 is a historical Psalm, meaning it recounts some of Israel's history, some of what went on in their relationship with God for the purpose that we would learn something, that there would be something that we would gain in that historical account. So Psalm 78, Verse 1:

**Listen, O my people, to my instruction;**

**Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.** (Psalm 78:1; \*NASB)

The psalmist starts with the words to listen to what he has to say. There's a sense of urgency to listen because something is to be revealed that is important. Something that he wants us to incline our ears and to listen to that he's going to recount. Verse 2:

**I will open my mouth in a parable;**

**I will utter dark sayings of old,** (v. 2)

When he talks about a parable it's not quite the same sense as the parables that Jesus told in the Gospels. When he talks about a parable, he's talking about that he's going to be mixing some stories together from Israel's history. And as he does so, he wants to teach us something. But if

you will, he wants us to understand some wisdom that God would have us learn and He would have us grow in. That's what he means by a parable.

And then he says that these are going to be **“dark sayings of old”**. What he means is these aren't necessarily going to be happy thoughts. They're going to be reflections of what went good in Israel's history and maybe what wasn't so good.

The interesting part as I study Scripture is that God's Word really opens us up to bare. He really gives both sides of His people's response to Him. Sometimes we see the great triumphs. Sometimes we see the failures. Sometimes we see the good things about how this people responded. And sometimes we see the not so good things.

You know what? I think there's great value in both. I think Scripture would teach us both have great value in our lives – to learn, to watch and to meditate upon how people have responded to God's Word and God's truth and God's expectation for our lives.

He goes on, and he says:

**I will utter dark sayings of old,  
Which we have heard and known,  
And our fathers have told us.  
We will not conceal them from their children,  
But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,  
And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.** (vs. 2b-4)

He says that these stories that he's going to recount are familiar stories. These are stories that had been on their lips. These are things that these people would have understood as they put these together. They're familiar to them.

And he says, do **“not conceal them from their children.”** These are stories to be reflected upon. These are stories to be shared. Why? Because as we grow and learn about how a generation before has engaged with God, we begin to have a greater understanding of who He is, to praise Him, to understand His strength, to understand His wondrous works, to understand how faithful God is. And these things were to be shared. They were to be revealed. They are to be passed on to the next generation.

Are you doing that? Are you passing on your story to the next generation? Sometimes I think we get caught up that we have to pass on the biblical stories. And you know that is incredibly important and incredibly valuable. But I think that also God would have us share our own stories of how we saw God working in our lives, how we saw God leading in our lives, how we saw God changing our lives. Stories passed on that make us reflect on what a great God He is, how wondrous He is, that He is a faithful God.

One of my fond memories is growing up outside of Wayne, Nebraska. It is at that point that I lived closest to both sets of my grandparents. And I remember sitting at my grandparents' feet and listening to their stories – the stories of some times that were hard, some times that were good.

I remember a particular story that always has stuck out to me. And it was a time my grandmother and her other children (they had eight children) decided they needed to have some chicken and dumplings for supper. Now some of you understand this that when they decided they needed

chicken and dumplings, they didn't have the option just to go to the supermarket and get a chicken. They went to the hen house and performed an execution.

But in this setting at this time, my grandfather was gone and so who was going to kind of do the dirty task with the chicken? So my grandmother came onto a plan: They would take two boards and they put the chicken's head between two boards and then the lot of them decided they would jump up and down on those boards until the chicken expired. (I believe to this day that that chicken has a special place in heaven for what it went through.)

So they stomped up and down until they thought the chicken was dead. They lifted the board up. The chicken jumped up, its head a little flattened, and ran off down the road. And I won't tell you what happened to the chicken after that – but they did have chicken and dumplings that night.

Now that's a funny story, but I remember them telling me that story in the context of God's faithfulness that they had that chicken because oftentimes there wasn't much to eat. There were often times that the ground didn't give many crops. There were often times they wondered where that next meal was going to come from.

And one of the things I remember them telling me over and over again is about God's faithfulness throughout those times of hardship. God's faithfulness in the face of sickness, God's faithfulness when everything seemed to be down, God came through. And that stuck with me.

My mom has taken lately to writing down some of her stories so that her grandchildren would know her faith history, of her faith walk, of what happened in her life. I think that's wonderful. Are you sharing your story with somebody? Specifically, are you sharing your story with a younger generation that needs to hear "how great is your God." Whether you're a parent or grandparent or just somebody who has a significant relationship with somebody in that next generation, are they hearing your story that reminds them of God's faithfulness that they may praise with you, that they may count with you the wondrous works of God? I think that's important to the psalmist.

Let's go on, verse 5:

**For He established a testimony in Jacob  
And appointed a law in Israel,  
Which He commanded our fathers  
That they should teach them to their children,** (v. 5)

The psalmist has the understanding that the tribe of Israel, Jacob's family, had a testimony with God – that God had given them that testimony of His faithfulness of what He did in their lives. But even more than that He'd given them His law – what He expected of them, His Word, His truth. And He commanded them that that was to be passed on to the next generation—that teaching, that experience was to go to that next part in their family line. And then he says,

**That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born,  
That they may arise and tell them to their children,** (v. 6)

The psalmist makes very clear that the reason that they are to do this is that the next generation – that these children – would know about God. I think sometimes we get a little confused about what it means to really know something. We have a tendency to think about the classroom experience,

maybe in a Sunday school class, that somebody really knows something if they can recite the facts to you. Do they know the story? Can they regurgitate it to you?

I think the psalmist will tell us it is much, much more. I've heard Bryan remind us several times to really know something means that it affects the way that you live. To really know something causes you to live a different way. It causes you to live in light of who God really is.

And I think that's the idea that the psalmist has – is that 'knowing' here and what is passed on should be in such a way that they really have brought it into their lives and it guides their lives. It changes how they live and how they respond to life. Isn't that what we want for the next generation? Not just to know something in a head-knowledge kind of way, but to have it affect their lives. Well how do we do that?

Well I think the key to that is the way that the Jewish people often lived that out. We talked about at the baby dedication in Deuteronomy 6 it was to be something taught not in a classroom experience but as a way of life as you're doing life together processing who God is and how we respond to life.

To be the key influencer in our child's life those who are much smarter than me (that study child psychology and what it means to see children develop in their walk with Christ and in their faith) tell us that there are three things that cause a child to be influenced by someone. An influencer in their lives is somebody that they spend time with, it's somebody that listens to them, it's somebody that plays with them, it's somebody that tells them their story and connects with their story.

Do you know who the biggest storyteller in your child's life is? Many would say parents. Actually it's often the TV. TV is the great storyteller of our time. And many times children grow in their understanding of values and what they believe far more from the TV than other aspects in their lives because that's the influencer. That's the one spending time with them. That's the one telling them stories.

Who's influencing the children in your lives? I think the psalmist would have us understand that needs to flow out of our relationship with our children. One other thing though that I think is key in this is that that doesn't mean that's just the responsibility of parents. I totally understand and believe that parents have a high calling by God to raise up and train the next generation to follow Him. But I think we do Scripture injustice when we leave it there. Many times what it's framed as is that as a body of believers, as a family of faith, collectively, it is our responsibility to prepare the next generation to take their stand to follow Him. To play our part collectively in making sure that happens by supporting families, by supporting those children.

I spent some time yesterday in some of our training with over a hundred of our workers in Children's Ministry, and I have to tell you they are a great lot to be spending time with because they are passionate about seeing children grow in their walk with Jesus Christ. They're passionate about wanting to see every child that comes to our church growing in their understanding of who God is and the impact that He wants to have in that child's life.

But even with all that passion and all that desire that they have to see that done, they need us to help in that process, to put a value on seeing children grow in our ways. The stakes are high. I think they're sometimes higher than we anticipate. I don't want to over-dramatize that but I think the stakes are higher than sometimes we reflect upon.

Let's read the rest of what the psalmist would say here:

**That they should put their confidence in God  
And not forget the works of God,  
But keep His commandments,** (v. 7)

That's the desire that this next generation would put their confidence in God because of what they know from the previous generation and what they've been taught and what they've been prepared for. But then he says:

**And not be like their fathers,  
A stubborn and rebellious generation,  
A generation that did not prepare its heart  
And whose spirit was not faithful to God.  
The sons of Ephraim were archers equipped with bows,  
Yet they turned back in the day of battle.  
They did not keep the covenant of God  
And refused to walk in His law;  
They forgot His deeds  
And His miracles that He had shown them.** (v. 8-11)

When I read this passage and particularly these last verses, to be honest with you, as a father it scares me a little bit. It scares me because the way that the psalmist has set this up is that that previous generation did not pass on their faith, did not share with them what God's goodness was, His strength. And so when it came to that time for that tribe of Ephraim to take their stand in their moment for God, they were doomed because they had nothing to stand upon. That relationship with God was not there. By their own desire of not wanting to follow God's commands, but also because a story was not shared and was not passed on to the next generation. That's why I say I think the stakes are much higher than sometimes we think. This generation that is coming up needs to hear what God has done in our lives and the victory we have seen.

One of the things that I enjoy in my spare time is I'm a little bit of a history buff. I like to read about different cultures and their history. I'm one that likes to sit down and just watch the History Channel. I'm happy all night. (My wife does not share that passion unfortunately.) But I enjoy reading and studying about what has gone into different cultures.

And one of the ones that has intrigued me is the British culture, the British nation. You see in the late 1800s and the early 1900s, you had a great revival that swept that country and people were taking stands for Christ. And the church was sending out missionaries all around the world and making a great impact. If you read some of things that were happening though in their own country, whole towns went dry. The bars all closed. Not because people were picketing or anything, but just because there wasn't the interest anymore. You see a culture just dynamically changing and again making this huge impact for the kingdom of God. But within a couple of decades, it was lost.

Now historians and those who study this tell you that some of the impact was two World Wars that disenchanting the people. We also know that at that time there was great dissatisfaction with the government. There was great dissatisfaction with organized religion. But scholars that study that history say there's one other thing and it was a major component of what caused those people, that next generation, not to follow the ways of their parents. And that was that that previous generation did not pass on their faith. They were doing great things around the world, but they were not

affecting their own families with a passion to follow Him, to understand who He is, to understand what He expected of them. And a nation was lost. And they are still paying the price for that failure.

Could it happen to us? I pray not. But one of the things I know that we have to continue to be diligent about is preparing that next generation to follow Him. A lot of people that study about why young people are walking away from the faith are talking about beefing up youth ministry, beefing up college ministry. And I think those are hugely important. But it also starts way back in the womb—that we purpose to teach the next generation, to share with them who God is, to share with them His mighty works and how wonderful He is, how He always comes through. So in their time, in their place, they will take their stand for God.

As we prepare in a couple of weeks to move into the new auditorium, I think about what my prayer would be for us as a church family. And my prayer is that the people in our community would see us as a church with a big heart for God, that we are passionate about God and passionate in walking in His ways and knowing His truth. But also that we would be seen as a people that have a big heart for those outside of the church and love people and want to love them into God's kingdom. And that we would be a church known for our gracious acts of love and care for our community. There's one other thing that I pray about. That people would see us as a church that loves our children, that is diligent and committed in raising up that next generation to follow Him, that we would be known as a church that helps our children grow in their walk that at some point they will spread their wings and take their stand in God's redemptive plan to His glory and to His praise.

*Father I thank You for the reminder that we receive of what happened in the tribe of Ephraim. Father I am convicted that at their point in time, they didn't stand for You and it fell to another tribe – the tribe of Judah to lead the nation. It fell to another young man – really a shepherd boy – who at his point in time, he did take his stand, a stand against a giant because he believed in You and he had faith in You, Father. Father, my prayer is that we would be raising up a generation of 'Davids', boys and girls that would love You, be committed to You with their lives, that when called upon, they'll be ready to take their stand for You. I pray this in Your Son's name, Amen.*