

10.1.23

One Important Task:

Telling the coming generation, the glorious deeds of the LORD Psalm 78

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Do you have anything you consider valuable? I'm not talking about people who are precious to us of course, but something else. What do you do with something valuable? Keep it in a secure place. Put it under lock and key. Keep it out of sight. Many people hide things that are valuable. In ancient times, people would bury at least some of their valuables in the ground so if there was unexpected trouble, an attack of some kind, they wouldn't lose everything, and they'd hope to one day be able to return and reclaim what they hid. We're less likely to bury things in the ground today. We're more likely to use safe deposit boxes or a safe to hide our valuables.

The next scripture is about something very valuable, it's not gold, silver, or jewelry, and more importantly, it's not to be hidden, it's to be shared widely and freely.

Listen to **Psalm 78:1-4, & 12-16**

"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 ancestors have told us.

We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

In the sight of their ancestors he worked marvels in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan. He divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap. In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all night long with a fiery light. He split rocks open in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers."

Psalm 78 is the second longest Psalm in the Book of Psalms and it's long because it tells the story of all the Lord God had done for the people of Israel. The psalm opens with a call to listen as the speaker opens their mouth in a parable. The word translated parable has the sense of **a hidden truth**; something that might not be immediately obvious, and which will require thought and concentration. We're being encouraged to pay attention!

The parable is the story of God's dealings with the people of Israel, but before that, the writer tells us **why we should listen and why they are recounting this long story**. This story is not only for adults, but also for the benefit of the children, the next generation. **The command of the Lord is that the coming generation needs to know of the deeds of the Lord; the wonders God has done**. The ancestors taught their children, the next generation, to pass this teaching on to the subsequent generation—all with **the purpose that subsequent generations will set their hope on God; not forget his works; and keep his commandments**.

There are few choices more important than choosing to tell the story of faith to the next generation. Each generation is to tell God's story so that the following generation places their hope on God, remembers God's goodness, and lives faithfully in obedience to God's commandments which are given to help us thrive and flourish. Sometimes there's a tendency among those who are older to despair of and complain about the behavior and attitudes of the next generation. Some of us might have to confess that from time to time we've grumbled and even God forbid complained about how the next generation doesn't get things like "our" generation did. They don't dress properly, don't listen to good music, how the next generation is squandering the legacy "our" generation has given them. However, those of us who are older need to know that there's also much of the opposite – younger generations angry with those who are older for failing in so many important areas including caring for the environment, a lack of ethical leadership, and a failure of government and other large institutions to solve problems and make life better.

The Psalmist expects better things as the next generation is taught to put their hope in God and to live with the knowledge and assurance of God's goodness and love. The rest of Psalm 78 consists of telling the story of the history of the nation of Israel from the events of the Exodus and wandering in the wilderness (verses 9-51). The history wanders back and forth in time and then fast forwards to the Assyrian invasion (verses 56-67) and its devastating consequences of exile for the nation of Israel. Finally, the psalm ends with a reminder of the promises God made to David (verses 67-72).

The telling of the story moves between the sinfulness and rebellion of the people of Israel (verse 17) and the Lord's response. Sometimes this is judgement (verse 31,

verses 59-64), **but the overall picture is of a kind and loving God who patiently and persistently keeps promises** (verse 38, verses 52-54). In the back and forth between Israel's rebellion and God's faithfulness, it's the faithfulness of God that prevails.

As we meditate on the message of Psalm 78 for our own lives we can ponder our responsibility to succeeding generations. The importance of instructing our children in the ways of the Lord is a familiar theme through the Scriptures. We will not hide from our children the stories of God and his people in all their glory and shame. They need to hear the warnings and the judgements. Above all they (and we) need to be assured of the compassion and forgiveness of God, and all God's glorious deeds and might.

And we have an even better story to tell than the ancient Israelites. We've heard from Jesus who also opened his mouth to speak in parables and proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world (see Matthew 13:35, quoting Psalm 78:2). You and I are called to pass on the story of God to the next generation from the beginning of creation to the fulfilment in God's Son, Jesus Christ, so that they may also set their hope in God, not forget the Lord's works, and keep God's commandments.

We've received so many cards and messages from people since my dad died two weeks ago and we've been touched by what many of you have shared about how my dad impacted your life. Ellen Meier wrote about one experience, and I asked her permission to share it with you. She wrote, *"I remember talking with your dad way back at a church conference in Falmouth. It was probably in the early 2000s. He mentioned how we all needed to share our experiences from Falmouth with the congregation one Sunday. And I said I wasn't sure I could do this because I had so much trouble talking in front of large groups. **And he looked at me and said in a very kind but clear way that it was really my responsibility to do this. And I needed to do it.** I always remember this conversation because it showed me how much responsibility and "commitment" meant to him and also how he passed that down to his family. I did actually share my experiences one Sunday and was a nervous wreck but afterwards was very grateful to have taken part."*

It really is your and my responsibility to tell the generations younger than us, **"the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done."** And we need to do it. I know that there are many people here and watching who have

children, grandchildren, and even great children who you wish and pray, and hope would share your faith in the good and loving God we worship and serve, but who don't yet share that commitment. What can you do if that's your situation?

1. Pray daily for your family members and for any individual you want to share your faith with and whom you want to see have a transforming friendship with Jesus.

2. Know The Story. You need to be able to tell the story of God's love in Jesus clearly, concisely, and compellingly. All it takes is one look at the world to know that human beings left on our own are selfish, ignorant, greedy, violent, and destructive. This is the impact of sin. God is so good, God loves the world and the people of the world so much, God was willing to enter this mess in the person of Jesus to show us a better way to live as loving members of God's family. Jesus lived a life of love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, justice, generosity, healing, wisdom, and hospitality. We're invited to join Jesus in living this way, but we need God's help to do it. The love of God and is shown supremely in being willing to die to try and save us. According to **1 John 2:2**, Christ, *"is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only **but also for the sins of the whole world.**"*

Not only do you need to know the story of God's love, but **3. You need to know your story.** You need to be able to share in a conversation the difference being a follower of Jesus is making in your life. What difference has Christ made in how you live your life? In your values, priorities, commitments, how you utilize your time, how you allocate your resources, in your attitude, speech, and thinking? In how you regard and treat other people? If you've never written out that story, that's a good place to start, and try to do it clearly, concisely, and compellingly.

God raised Jesus from the dead to show that ultimately death doesn't have the final word and God wins. In heaven there'll be saints from **every tribe and language and people and nation as** described in **Revelation 5:9**, *"They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood **you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation.**'"* God's intention for the future of humanity is that people from every tribe, language, people, and nation will have had the chance to hear the story of God's love in Christ and to accept God's mercy and grace and so will be with God forever.

We can't personally go to every nation and tribe and that's why since the beginning of the Jesus movement, God has called people to leave their homes and native lands to travel to other places and bring the good news of God's love in Christ to people who have never heard the story of Jesus. There are many verses from Genesis to Revelation that stress God's love for people of every nation, tribe, and language and invite everyone to praise and serve God. Here are a couple:

Psalms 117:1 – "Praise the LORD, **all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.**"

Isaiah 34:1 – "*Come near, **you nations**, and listen; pay attention, **you peoples!** Let the earth hear, **and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it!***"

Isaiah 45:22 – "*Turn to me and be saved, **all you ends of the earth**; for I am God, and there is no other.*"

All around the world American Baptist Global Servants and our Mission Partners are sharing the gospel, planting churches, and meeting practical needs in Christ's name for food, agriculture, clean water, education, medical care, shelter, deliverance from human trafficking and more. They're only able to do that as people like us and churches like ours provide the financial support to enable them to be in the field.

As we begin to receive the World Mission Offering today and throughout the month of October, we're seeking to be faithful to the truth expressed in Psalm 78 about the importance of telling **the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.**

The final reference to all nations in the Bible is **Revelation 15:4** – "*Who will not fear you, O Lord, **and bring glory to your name?** For you alone are holy. **All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.***"

God's desire is for all nations to come and worship before the Lord, and we all have a part to play in making that happen and bringing salvation and transformation to people, and glory to God. As Psalm 78 urges us, **set your hope on God; don't forget all God's works of love, mercy, and grace, keep God's commandments which are given to help you thrive and flourish, and share the story with others.**

Blessing – Remember as Paul wrote Timothy (1 Timothy 2:3-4), that **God our Savior desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

Share the story of God's love, as God gives you opportunities to do so,

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Do you have anything valuable that you hide in a safe deposit box or a safe? Why do you keep whatever you have hidden?
2. Psalm 78 asserts the importance of not hiding the valuable news of who the Lord is and what God has done but telling the coming generation the “*glorious deeds of the Lord, his might, the wonders he has done.*” Are you doing that? Why or why not?
3. Why is it important for disciples to be sharing our faith, our lives, our testimonies to what God has done with people younger than ourselves? What happens if we don’t? How can you share in this way?
4. Psalm 78 is the second longest Psalm in the Bible, and it tells the story of God’s goodness and great deeds and the ingratitude and faithlessness of God’s people. Why is it important that Israel had the humility to preserve and pass on this story? How willing are you to admit or share your shortcomings and failures so others can learn from them? How do you strive to live with gratitude and faith in response to God’s goodness?
5. Have you ever traveled outside the United States? If so, do you have a favorite nation or two that you’ve visited, for example, Italy, Brazil, Japan? Nigeria? What do you like about that country?
6. There are many verses from Genesis to Revelation that stress God’s love for people of every nation, tribe, and language, how does the wideness of God’s mercy shape how you regard people from other countries? How can you support our Global Servants and Mission Partners who are serving in nations around the world?