

Psalm 78: Words of Witness for the Children of Hope

Tyler Velin | July 21, 2013

One of the things that we are committed to at Sovereign Hope is expository preaching. That is where we take portions, or whole books of the Bible, and exposit it, we unpack it, we let the text of the passage dictate the meaning of the message.

That's why in our college group, and our youth group, we don't give topical messages on how to obey your parents and how to date well. What we do is we look at what the Bible says as a whole and we present that. And when we do that, we have found that the Bible is far better at communicating a vast range of topics than we give it credit for.

For instance we don't talk a lot about dating at GCF, but we went through Colossians last year which talks about marriage. When you preach the beauty of marriage in the eyes of God, you automatically begin to change the perception of dating in the eyes of a college student.

Even though a college student may not think that marriage is an eminent step for them in the near future, by looking at the end result, they become changed by the present message. This is the beauty of a divinely inspired Word of God.

I say this because today is one of those passages where it would be very easy for those who are not at this stage in life to check out. Today we are looking at Psalm 78, which deals with teaching children. Some of you in here are children, some act like children, some haven't even began to think about children, and some are post children. Then there are those in here with children. But you parents with children, you are not the primary demographic of this Psalm, the people of God is. This Psalm was written for the whole church, and we will see that as we get into it.

Pray

Let me give you some quick background information on this Psalm. This Psalm is 72 verses long, it is one of the longer Psalms in the Bible and I think that tells you a little something about the weight of the subject. God is not uninterested in our children, God is passionate about his future hearts which were won at the cross of Christ. But this Psalm was written by Asaph and it is set up kind of funny. The purpose and point of his Psalm is given in verses 1-8, verses 1-8 is what he wants to communicate. But then in verses 9-72 Asaph gives us an example of how we ought to achieve the commands in verses 1-8. And he does this by giving the narrative of Israel from Moses to David, and the narrative climaxes in 67-72 as he reflects on the Ark of the Covenant being returned to Jerusalem.

So the narrative climaxes at the joy that comes with the presence of God, and that joy is what leads him to speak to us in verses 1-8.

In this first chunk I am going to break it up into the what of Asaph's message, and the why.

Psalm 78:1-6 The What

Now I want to stop here. I have this nasty tendency in school, and that is to ignore the syllabus. I look at the schedule of the class, I see when the due dates for my assignments are, and then I don't look back at the syllabus until those due dates are...tomorrow. The problem is in doing that I am shortchanging myself because if I were to look at my assignments ahead of time I would know what I should be pulling out of the lectures. So many times we do this with the Bible too. If I were to read straight through verses 1-8 anyone who is not a parent, or who has raised their children into adults, would probably listen with a slightly less tuned ear to this Psalm than a parent would.

But the word "parent," the phrases "your children, my children or even our children" are never used. Instead we see Asaph gathering the people in verse one. And then he talks about our fathers and their children. Verse 4 says we will not hide them from their children. Who is your father's son? Your brother. Who is your mother's daughter? Your sister.

After it talks about your father's children, then in verse four he says "but tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might, and the wonders that he has done."

Not only are we to present the glorious deeds of God to the children who are yet to come, but we are also to tell the wonders of his might to the children who are around us. The scope of this Psalm is not only to have parents teach their children, but to give the church the disease of uninhibited gospel proclamation.

But, we do see a special weight given to Children. Tell the coming generation, speak to a generation not yet born, and to their children. Church, the Psalmist is putting a special weight on us to go out of our way to preach to the

children.

Now I want to put together everything that we have just read. Who is called to speak and teach? The people of God. Who are we called to preach to? We are called to preach to our father's children, to the upcoming children, and to the children not yet born. We should not neglect the children for the adults and we should not neglect the adults for the children, but we should make a habit and a practice of preaching to everyone. Even to those not yet born.

And church, in order to teach the children not yet born, we must fight for the children not yet born.

We saw in verse 5 that God commanded the father to preach to their children. If you look at **Deut 4:9** we see just that. We preach to our children because God has told us to preach to our children. And we don't water down the message. Our children can sit and watch a two hour long movie, and spend 8 hours in school a day, but when it comes to the gospel we seem to shortchange what we believe their capacity is. We do not use the Bible to teach simple stories to help us share, and help us get along with our friends. We teach the Bible in the way the Bible wants to be taught. There is an amazing force of gospel proclamation locked up in the young people of our church. Ancient civilizations refused to allow nations to teach cause they knew this.

What are we called to preach of? We are called to preach of the glorious deeds of the Lord, his might, the wonders that he has done. We are called to reflect on the vastness of our God and the beauty of our salvation. And why? Why should we preach this message? **The Why- Vv 7-8**. We preach the message of Christ to our father's children, to our children, to the children yet to come and the children of our children's children because we want them to be a children of hope who avoid the hard-heartedness of sin and faithfully choose to worship God.

I love this passage in **Deut 6:6-15** which show us the who, the what and the why in perfect combination. Why do we preach the gospel to our children? So that the wrath of God is not kindled against us.

Now this concept is a little different for us on this side of the cross. For those who are in Christ we are safe from the wrath of God, but to not speak the gospel of Christ to those who are around you is to break the commands of Christ. The command to go and make disciples, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded.

You see it is very providential that Psalm 78 follows Psalm 77 because if we are unable to preach the gospel to ourselves like Psalm 77 prescribes, we will be limited in our ability to preach the gospel to others. Your ability to preach the gospel to yourself is a direct correlation to your ability to preach the gospel to other.

I was doing some research for our community group leader training which will be coming up this fall. And I ran across a quote which really put a great bridge between the inward proclamation of Psalm 77 and the outward proclamation of 78.

The desire to go and make disciples is rooted in the internalization that Jesus is worthy to be worshiped.
B. House

Now, as I mentioned for the next 66 verses Asaph is going to spend time retelling the history of Israel, but as he said in the beginning, he is sharing with them a parable. Parables are meant to teach, so while these events are real and historical events in history, he doesn't simply want to give them history, he wants to give them inspiration for proclamation.

Also at this point I would like to clarify something. This Psalm was written prior to the gospel, but as you have probably noticed I have already made reference to preaching the gospel from this Psalm. That is because Asaph is going to use the Exodus and the line of David as a teaching tool for the Israelites, and both of those things are place holders for Christ.

They are like the caterpillar, God made a beautifully intricate and interesting story line in the OT, and we should look at its beauty and respect it in its own light, but God knew that a transformation was coming. God wrote the Old Testament knowing that it was going to find its culmination in Christ. While the Old Testament has a certain weight of its own, the caterpillar was made to become a butterfly. We see the caterpillar in light of the Butterfly, we read the OT in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So we see gospel dropping in the OT and God wants us to bring those into the light of the cross of Christ.

Now here is what I want to do very quickly. Rather than reading through all 66 verses of this narrative, I want to do what Asaph wanted the Israelites to do. I want us to look at this story and draw out points that help us preach the gospel to our children. How does the story of the exodus, which was a foreshadowing of our own exodus from sin and to Christ, help us preach the gospel to our father's children and to our children?

Three quick points of dialogue that help us do this.

Speak of your weakness and God's strength

See all of these things are reflecting your history and God's interaction with it. In the same way Asaph wanted to

use the history of the Israelites to show the coming generation the beauty of God, we need to learn to use our history to show our children the glory of God.

We see this in **Psalm 78:9-13**. We are too weak to save ourselves. C.S. Lewis calls us half hearted creatures. But God is strong and mighty, God parts waters and restores souls. **2 Cor 12:9-10** shows us that we should rejoice in our weakness so that others can rejoice in our Christ.

Speak of your sin and God's grace

So many times we feel disqualified from ministry, from evangelism or from church because we struggle with sin. But it is the presence of sin that testifies to our great need of a savior.

You are not God, you are not sinless, and that's ok. Be open about your sin to point to the grace of God. Asaph did that. Time after time in this Psalm we see phrases like, "They did not keep God's covenant, they forgot his words, yet they sinned more against him, in spite of this they still sinned, their heart was not steadfast toward him, they provoked the Holy One of Israel, yet they rebelled against the most high God."

But Asaph also shows God's grace towards a sinful people **78:38**. Guess what I am a sinner saved by grace. There is not testimony more powerful than that simple phrase, for by grace we have been saved through faith and this is not your doing, it is the gift of God.

God's grace wasn't a weak grace he didn't merely brush our sin under a rug, but he delivered us from his wrath.

Speak of your due reward and God's great gift.

Look at the narrative in verses **58-61**.

In this moment, when Israel turned into idolatry, God rejected them. This is when God allowed the Philistines to come in and take the ark, God removed his presence from his people. We have not earned salvation, we have earned damnation. In a works based theology we get what we work for and we all worked hard for hell.

We deserve death and eternal separation, for the wages of sin is death, and all have sinned and fell short of the glory of God...but look at verse **70-72**.

After the Philistines took the ark away from Israel, King David brought the ark back to Israel. Through David the presence of God was restored to Israel, and through Jesus, the greater David, the true ruler of the people of God, we have access to the presence of God.

Let your children know the weight of your sin and the grace of God through the sacrifice of his son. This is what they need to know. Jesus gives us access to God. Jesus takes away the sins of the world. Jesus died so that we may live, Jesus was cast off so that we can be brought near, Jesus was crushed so that we may be lifted up, Jesus was persecuted so that we may be loved, Jesus was crucified so that we may have life and life abundantly.

Teach this to your children. It is easy for us to put off evangelism because it is hard, it is difficult and it is awkward. But all of these are overcome in Christ. Rejoice in the simplicity of your salvation and let it resonate to those around.

Pray that God strikes your heart with the mallet of Christ so that we may ring true with the sound of salvation.

1 Cor 1:25-29

Let me offer you one final bit of encouragement in your quest for evangelism. John Owen is considered to be one of the most influential theologians since the reformation. He wrote countless books, preached hundreds of sermons, and we have access to all of those still today. But when John Owen was asked to summarize his pastoral ministry, he said that there was not a single person he could point to that he had a forming influence in that person's life.

But look at what Psalm 78 says. We are not laboring simply for our brothers, we are laboring for our children, and our children's children, and their children to a generation yet to come. We faithfully labor in the realm of gospel proclamation, and God will faithfully labor in the realm of gospel transformation.

Five generations were changed in Psalm 78, do not neglect the power of it in your home and in your workplace. Do not be disappointed in it because we simply sowed through seeds, but God brings the fruit.

Rejoice and be glad, tell of his wonderful deeds and rest in his powerful cross.