

## "Honey, We're Killing the Kids, Part 2"

### Psalm 78

#### Introduction

- Last week we began our examination of Psalm 78 which addresses the unparalleled importance of passing on a spiritual heritage in Christ to the next generation. We talked about how our children will not embrace this heritage by osmosis. It must be imparted to them, stamped on their lives. While we have them we are to do everything we can to pave the way for God's grace so that when the time comes for them to make their faith their own they choose God. My goal last week was to prick your consciences and prepare your hearts for this week as we now look at the content that needs to be passed on to our children.
- One of *The Songs of Life* we sing is the song for our children. Psalm 78 is God's way of reminding us of our top priority as parents. Again, more important than the food we put on the table or the roof over their heads or their education or the cultural experiences we give them, our children need a spiritual heritage in Christ.

#### Proposition

- **Our chief responsibility as parents and grandparents is transmitting to the next generation God's glorious deeds so that our children might trust in Him**
- The ultimate goal of Christian instruction is to entertainment with the stories of the bible, right? No. The ultimate goal of Christian instruction is children who know their bible stories, right? No. The ultimate goal of Christian instruction is children who are polite and stay out of trouble, right? No. The ultimate goal of Christian instruction is children who know right from wrong, right? No. The ultimate goal of Christian education is to engender a dynamic, personal trust in Yahweh, the living God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity is not about rules and lists. It's about a person and a relationship. And the transmission of all the ingredients necessary to see this relationship repeated in our children's lives is the greatest challenge and joy of parenting.
- Have you ever watched a relay race? Have you ever studied the way a runner passes on the baton? At the completion of each leg in a relay, the runner enters a zone, called the passing zone, which enables the baton receiver to start running in preparation for the baton exchange."<sup>1</sup> Let me ask you, how long are both runners in the passing zone before the second runner emerges to run the rest of the race alone? Seconds. The amount of time you have to influence your children is a blur and they are off and running on their own before you know it.
- Unfortunately, more often than not, in the exchange that takes place between Christian parent and child, the baton is dropped. In the last thirty years, the amount

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<sup>1</sup>"Track and Field," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

of influence parents have on their children has dwindled to nil and, in all likelihood, even if your children grow up in a Christian home; you are no longer the primary influence in your child's life. The average American child sees twenty-thousand television commercials every year.<sup>2</sup> What are you doing to combat that? And that's just television. What about everything else our culture throws at them? Who's really forming your kids? Values which were formerly transmitted by parents from generation to generation are now passed on to them by different sources.

- [David Wells](#) in his book *God in the Wasteland* explains the situation like this. "The problem has progressed to the point that in Our Time the young gather most of their values elsewhere, most commonly from peers and the cinematic and video fantasies with which their inner world is randomly festooned. Over time, other agencies have moved in or been forced in to make good the deficit. Added to peer groups and the mass media, perhaps at a second level of importance in this new mode of parenting, are the schools and the 'helping professions.' This coalition of parental surrogates, cobbled together in a blind attempt to preserve the social order, has ironically had the effect of further diminishing the remaining parental authority."<sup>3</sup>
- The kind of children—their character, their disposition, what they believe, how they view the world, the kind of children produced by this cobbled together coalition of parental surrogates is frightening. Again listen to [Wells'](#) analysis. "Children who have grown up or are growing up in this...[environment]...are cut loose from everything, hollowed out, eclectic, patched together from scraps of personality picked up here and there, leery of commitments, empty of all passions except that of sex, devoid of the capacity for commitment, fixated on image rather than substance, operating on the seductive elixir of unrestricted personal preference, and informed only by personal intuition. They are sophisticates haunted by ominous superstitions, brittle rationalists living in the grip of outrageous myths, shifting, aching beings who gaze on the world as voyeurs and whose vision of salvation has dwindled to nothing more than hope for a fleeting sense of personal well-being. When these shape a faith after their own habits, as they are doing in some evangelical churches, it does not much resemble the classic contours of historic Christianity."<sup>4</sup>
- I have seen a statistic that suggests only four percent of teenagers today will be Bible-believing Christians as adults. Think about that for a second. Four percent. Think about all the teenagers you know; all the students in the area high schools. Four percent. Think of the teenagers in this church. Four percent. Think of the children in your family. Now "compare that to thirty-five percent of the current generation of baby boomers, and before that, sixty-five percent of the World War II generation."<sup>5</sup> We are failing to transmit to the next generation God's glorious deeds, both in the past and in our lives now, and we are on the verge of losing a generation. Time is of the essence.

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<sup>2</sup> Wells, p. 218-9.

<sup>3</sup> Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, p. 217.

<sup>4</sup> Wells, p. 222-3.

<sup>5</sup> Laurie Goodstein, "Evangelicals Fear the Loss of Their Teenagers," *The New York Times*, October 6, 2006.

- That brings us to the solution which has to do with the content of what we're transmitting to our kids. All too frequently, what's passed down to our kids is so bland, so milquetoast, so uncaptivating, so un compelling in its view of God and the Christian life that when our kids in adolescence and adulthood turn to things that do compel them and captivate them but also destroy them.

### Transition

So what are we as parents to pass on? What should we transmit to them? Turn to where we left off last week, verse 9 of Psalm 78. The theme of Psalm 78 starting in verse 9, the content of what we are to transmit to our children, is God's glorious deeds, his great miracles and grace that persist through judgments. The story of Israel in this psalm is ugly. They are disobedient. They are testy. They are ungrateful. They are obstinate. They are rebellious and we are just like them in every respect. But "if Israel's record is her shame, God's persistent goodness emerges as her hope (and ours)."<sup>6</sup> This morning I want to share with you the [first of six lessons](#) we absolutely must pass on to our children. If your children or grandchildren are going to receive a spiritual heritage in Christ these six things are the backbone of that heritage.

### Main Points

- The [first lesson](#) comes from [verses 9-16](#). First and foremost, we must pass on to our children that **God is a covenant making God**. It is impossible to understand the message of the bible or God himself without understanding the nature of biblical covenants. Two hundred eighty-five times in the Old Testament alone the word covenant is used.<sup>7</sup> So, what is a covenant? A covenant is an agreement between two parties, a solemn commitment with promises and/or obligations for one or both of those parties.<sup>8</sup> Biblical covenants are usually unalterable and permanently binding.<sup>9</sup> The closest parallel today would be a treaty between nations. But treaties nowadays are so impersonal compared to ancient covenants which were highly personal. A biblical covenant would be like two parties, each spitting in their hands and shaking on something, binding themselves to each other.
- You probably know more about covenants than you realize. Mostly we recognize biblical covenants through the signs that accompany them. God, when he is the guarantor, the major party in the covenant, he always gives a sign proving he'll keep up his end of the agreement. Remember God's covenant with Noah in Genesis 8-9? God promised he would never again destroy the earth with water and gave the rainbow as a covenant sign. Or Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3? God promised Abraham he'd make his descendents into a great nation as numerous as the sand on the seashore and gave circumcision as a covenant sign. Or Moses in Exodus 24? God made a covenant with Israel through Moses and gave the Book of the Law with the Sabbath rest as a covenant sign.

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<sup>6</sup> Kidner, p. 286.

<sup>7</sup> *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 420.

<sup>8</sup> NDBT, p. 420.

<sup>9</sup> *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 277.

- So how does all of this relate to Psalm 78? Here's how. Look at verse 10. The governing verse in this first section is [verse 10](#). I want to read starting at verse 9. *The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law.* Ephraim, the largest of the twelve tribes of Israel, symbolically represented the backsliding and apostasy of the entire nation.<sup>10</sup> Ephraim forgot God's miracles. They witnessed God's belittling of the so-called gods of the Egypt and deliverance through the ten plagues, verses 11-12. *They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them. 12 He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan.* They witnessed the parting of the Red Sea, verse 13. *He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall.* They witnessed God's presence in the cloud and fire guiding them through the wilderness, verse 14. *He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night.* And they witnessed God's abundant provision of water from the rock, verses 15-16. *He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; 16 he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.* And yet they still rebelled. They backslid. They apostatized. Why? How? This is important. Don't miss this. Because somehow the story of what was happening to them, somehow the miracles they experienced got separated, bifurcated from the covenantal agreement with God that stood behind those storied miracles. Let me say that again. Somehow the story of what was happening to them, somehow the miracles they experienced got separated from the covenantal agreement with God that stood behind those storied miracles. They did not keep the covenant God made with them, verse 10. They forgot what he did, verse 11. They failed to connect the two.
- Let me say it this way. I think one of the reasons our kids rebel and backslide and apostatize during adolescence and adulthood, just like Israel, is because, often times, we've taught them a bifurcated faith. In childhood they may learn the story of Noah or Abraham or Moses or the cross. They may even cultivate the trappings of a Christian lifestyle but if they haven't connected those stories with larger story of God's redemption and the covenantal nature of a God named Yahweh who wants to personally weave their existence into his story, they'll walk away. You can know the stories but never know what God wants from you in light of those stories. You can know the stories but never know what God wants you to know about him in light of those stories. **God is a covenant making God.**
- Last week I talked to you about some of the things we are trying to do with Ethan and I read to you some questions from Ethan's catechism book. Let me just sample from that book again. Listen to these four questions and answers Ethan is being taught.
  - Can you be saved through the covenant of life?
    - No, because I broke it and am condemned by it.
  - How did you break the covenant of life?
    - Adam represented me, and so I fell with him in the first sin.
  - How, then, can you be saved?

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<sup>10</sup> Kidner, p. 282.

- By the Lord Jesus Christ in the covenant of grace.
  - How did Jesus fulfill the covenant of grace?
    - He kept the whole law for his people and then was punished for all of their sins.<sup>11</sup>
- Just in these four questions, can you sense the difference between simply teaching bible stories and teaching the stories of a personal covenant-making God? Why are covenants important? The point is that covenants reveal something about the nature of God himself. Covenants by their nature imply personality and relationship. Dead things can't make covenants. *But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King.*<sup>12</sup> God is living and he has personhood. He is not aloof, distant, uninvolved, or absentee. He is a God who relationally involves himself with people and makes binding, unalterable agreements with them. Covenants and covenant language become a way of speaking about all of life in subordination to a living and loving God. And when we rebel against God, covenants "reveal the unfathomable depth of the love of God, who endures...profound inner conflict for the sake of sustaining his relationship with his people."<sup>13</sup> In other words, whenever God acts it is usually for the purpose of upholding his end of a covenant which says something incredibly important about how we must relate to him. We can't just pass on the stories about God we must pass on the stories and connect them to how we must relate to God. Without this connection between God's actions and his covenants Christianity becomes cold, lifeless, and dead—a heaped up pile of disjointed, unconnected stories void of relationship. And sometimes when our kids walk away from God what they're really walking away from is a cold, lifeless, dead Christianity that's been transmitted to them in God's name but is completely void of God himself.

## Conclusion

- As we close this morning, I want to turn your attention to the most important covenant in the bible. Listen to what God says in Jeremiah 31:31. *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."* This new covenant is how God dramatically changes lives. It is the reason we gather to worship. All the stories in the bible either lead up to the revelation of this covenant or explicate its ramifications. And we talk about this new covenant every single week. There isn't a Sunday that goes by that we don't fail to mention this new covenant by name. Listen closely and see if this sounds familiar. *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.* The prophet Jeremiah records that one day God would make a new covenant with his people.
- When we read the New Testament, we realize this covenant is fulfilled by Christ himself. His death on the cross, as celebrated in the Lord's Supper, becomes the sign. 1 Corinthians 11:25 *In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup*

<sup>11</sup> Susan and Richie Hunt, *Big Truths for Little Kids*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, 1999, p 44.

<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 10:10

<sup>13</sup> *New International Dictionary of Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 1, p. 753.

*is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." But the question remains, what is the nature of this covenant, of this agreement? For the answer to this question we must turn to the book of Hebrews. Listen to Hebrews 9:15. For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. Through Christ, the mediator of this new, eternal and permanently binding agreement, God enters into a covenantal relationship with us promising eternal life and freedom from our sins. The story of the cross is not simply the story of a good man dying as an example of love. The cross of Christ is God's new covenant with humanity. Romans 11:27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins. And by faith you must personally choose to enter into this covenantal relationship with God if the promise of the covenant, eternal life and forgiveness of sins, is to be binding for you. Otherwise you are still under the covenant that came into effect when Adam sinned in the garden, the covenant of death. Which do you choose? Which will you teach your children to choose? This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.<sup>14</sup> Let's pray.*

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<sup>14</sup> Deuteronomy 30:19