

"Honey, We're Killing the Kids, Part 3"

Psalm 78

Introduction

- For several weeks now we've been in Psalm 78 which speaks of the importance of passing on a spiritual heritage to the next generation. You are always passing on something to your children. As the video showed, by the father's silence he transmitted something very important about his view of God to his daughter.
- In my reading this week I was struck by a passage from the book of Judges. From the time of the Exodus until Israel's entry into the Promised Land the generations of Moses and Joshua had witnessed God's praiseworthy deeds. They were eyewitnesses of his power. They crunched the frogs under their feet as they walked the streets. They let the blood red Nile trickle between their fingers. They collected souvenirs from the bottom of the Red Sea and the heavenly sweet manna dissolved on their tongues. They followed the cloud by day and marveled at the pillar of flaming fireworks at night. You'd think the children and grandchildren of that generation would be spiritual giants, right? Listen to how Judges 2:10 describes the generation that followed Moses and Joshua. *After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did what was evil in the LORD'S sight and worshiped the images of Baal. They abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They chased after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the LORD.* What went wrong? The kids forgot. The stories grew stale. They weren't repeated and imparted and impressed and stamped. The lesson for us is this. If your children aren't constantly hearing from your lips about God's praiseworthy deeds and the mighty things he has done you are preparing your children to chase after other gods. You're killing your children spiritually.

Proposition

- **Parents, your chief responsibility is to transmit to the next generation God's glorious deeds so that your children might trust in Him**
- Children are not going to embrace a spiritual heritage in Christ by osmosis. As a potter forms a pot, they have got to be shaped and formed. As God's stewards of your children, He has asked you to do everything in your power to pave the way for His grace so that when the time comes for your children to make their faith their own they choose God.
- If I were to sum up the Psalm 78, this is how I'd do it. Verses 4 and 7. The purpose of transmitting God's praiseworthy deeds, his power and the wonders he has done is so that our children might put their trust in him. But that begs the question, what specifically is to be passed on? That's what the rest of the psalm is for.

Organizational Sentence

- **There are six (6) lessons in verses 9-72 we absolutely must pass on to our children if they are to grab hold of God and live for his glory.**

Transition

These six things are the backbone of a godly biblical heritage.

- Three weeks ago we looked at the [first lesson](#) from verses 9-16. God is a covenant making God. He is a God who relationally involves himself with people and makes binding, unalterable agreements with them. An absolutely vital lesson for our children to understand.

Transition

Turn to where we left off, verse 17. We'll get through the second and third lessons this week and take care of lessons four, five and six next week.

Main Points

- The [second lesson](#) we must pass on to our children comes from [verses 17-31](#). Listen. *But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High. 18 They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. 19 They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the desert? 20 When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?" 21 When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, 22 for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance. 23 Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; 24 he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. 25 Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat. 26 He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power. 27 He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. 28 He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. 29 They ate till they had more than enough, for he had given them what they craved. 30 But before they turned from the food they craved, even while it was still in their mouths, 31 God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel.*
- What does the psalmist record about God that should be transmitted to the next generation for the purpose of creating faith and trust in Him? The thing that jumps off the pages as I read these verses is God's anger. His wrath. The [second lesson](#) is this. **God is a God of wrath.** The background to this episode comes from Numbers 11:1-6. Turn to the fourth book of the Bible, Numbers 11:1-6. *Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. 2 When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the LORD and the fire died down. 3 So that place was called Taberah, because fire from the LORD had burned among them. 4 The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers,*

melons, leeks, onions and garlic. 6 But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

- Now, back to Psalm 78. Israel rebels, verse 17. She willfully puts God to the test like a defiant two-year-old, verse 18. And what is God's response? It's the same response you and I have when our kids defiantly do this to us. Verse 21. There's wrath. When the Lord heard them, he was infuriated. His fire broke out. His wrath rose against Israel. Jump ahead to verse 31. *God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel.*
- There are few topics as intolerable as God's wrath. It's interesting, a research study released in September of 2006 by sociologists from Baylor University suggests that based upon their view of God, most of America, roughly 70%, would think it antiquated, medieval—probably even barbaric to teach kids that God is a God of wrath.¹ "All that does is scare kids. Tell them about His love." And if that's where you are at in your thinking let me say very clearly you'll never understand God's love without first understanding how utterly repulsive and disdainful sin is to God. And it's impossible to understand how repulsive sin is if you neglect the wrath of God. Let me say it this way. It is impossible to understand God's love demonstrated by the cross of Christ and his grace given through the cross of Christ without first understanding the wrath of God toward sin poured out on the cross of Christ.
- You see, God's wrath is not like an out of control fire hose. Do you have that picture in your mind? God's wrath is not like a flailing, out of control firehouse spraying wrath, wrath, wrath, hate, hate, hate in every direction. "God's wrath means that he intensely hates all sin."² Instead, like a laser beam, God's wrath is his intense anger focused on sin. He hates sin. One of unifying threads of the biblical story is that God hates sin. All sin. Every sin. He hates my sin. He hates your sin. He must do something about sin. He must do something about your child's sin. God and your child's sin cannot coexist peacefully. Do they understand this?
- And this aspect of God's character, that He pours out his wrath on sin, is not an Old Testament phenomenon alone. There is no such thing as the Old Testament God of wrath and the New Testament God of love. He is both a God of wrath and a God of love. In fact, more than thirty times in the New Testament we read about God's wrath and as a percentage of the number of total words God's wrath is talked about more in the New Testament than in the Old. Romans 2:5 *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.* Or John 3:36 *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."* And we should praise God that he is a God who pours out his wrath on sin. I love how [Wayne Grudem](#) puts it. "We should thank God and praise him that he hates sin. What would God be like if he did not hate sin? He would be a God who either delighted in sin or at least was not troubled by it. Such a

¹ Cathy Lunn-Grossman, "American's Image of God Varies," USAToday.com (9-11-06)

² Grudem, p. 206.

God would not be worthy of our worship, for sin is hateful and it is worthy of being hated.”³

- Just for a second, I want you to imagine that you're in Puritan New England sitting in the congregational church in Northampton, Massachusetts circa 1741 listening to the droning preaching of Jonathan Edwards. Of all Edwards' sermons *Sinners In the Hands of An Angry God* is the best known and the most misunderstood. But the power of his imagery is undeniable. As someone has said, "Who can resist trembling before the frightening image of sinners dangled by a vengeful God like loathsome spiders over the flames, or of treading on a paper-thin, rotting canvas, not knowing at what moment you might plunge into the abyss and face a just and judging God? The words echo through time in their haunting description of the plight of the damned. In his measured cadence, Edwards [preached], 'The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation don't slumber, the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them, the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened her mouth under them.'"⁴ "If God should only withdraw his hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and it would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, sturdiest devil in hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it."⁵ I find it interesting that the Great Awakening, this huge intercolonial movement of God that changed lives and institutions and culture for generations came about in part because of preaching about the wrath of God.
- That's the purpose of this section of Psalm 78. As we read it and teach it to our children God wants us to acutely feel the danger you and I are in because of our sin. We are Israel. We rebel. We continue to sin against him. We willfully put God to the test in a million ways. We fail to believe in him and trust in his deliverance. All of us have gratified the cravings of our sinful nature following its desires and thoughts and so we are by nature objects of wrath.⁶ So the goal of teaching our children about the wrath of God is not to scare them into the kingdom but give them an acute awareness of sin before a holy and just God who hates their sin. We do our children a great disservice if we fail to point out to them the blackness of their own hearts from God's perspective. And we make the road to his grace all the more difficult if we teach them a gospel stripped of its good news—the news that we have been spared the eternal wrath of God by the cross of Jesus Christ.
- So how do you do it? How do you teach this aspect of God's character to a six year old? Object lessons help. I have in my hands two balloons. They are different in color and content. And they represent two kinds of lives. One, a life without Jesus

³ Grudem, p. 206.

⁴ *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, edited by John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema, p. xvii.

⁵ Kimmach, Minkema & Sweeney, eds., *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," p. 56-7.

⁶ Ephesians 2:3

and two, a life with Jesus at the center. And I have in my hand a lighter which represents God's wrath, his white hot anger directed toward sin. Kids, what do you think will happen when I put this flame to this balloon? Obviously, it will pop. The flame consumes the balloon. It's destroyed. If nothing is done about the sin that naturally resides in your heart what will happen when God's wrath is turned toward your sin? Now the second balloon. It's different than the first. There's water in it and the water represents Christ. Kids, what do you think will happen when I put the flame to this balloon? Do you think it will pop? It doesn't pop. Why? Because of Christ. If you believe by faith that the cross of Christ takes away your sin, then when God pours out the fire of his wrath on your sin it is absorbed by Christ and you're not consumed—destroyed by his wrath.

Transition

You see, and now I'm speaking to everyone, we should feel no fear of God's wrath. Even though we were by nature children of wrath, we know we have been delivered from the wrath to come if we have Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 *Jesus, [the one] who rescues us from the coming wrath.* Can you see how an appropriate understanding of God's wrath paves the way for the love and grace of Christ? That brings us, appropriately, to the third lesson.

- The **third lesson** we must pass on to our children comes from verses 32-39. It's no surprise that following the wrath of God, Psalm 78 instructs that we must pass on to our children that **God is a God of unending mercy, grace and patience.** Listen. Verse 32. *In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe.* 33 *So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror.* 34 *Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again.* 35 *They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer.* 36 *But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; 37 their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant.* 38 *Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath.* 39 *He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.*
- There's a cycle of behavior in these verses. Did you pick up on it? More sin. God's punishment. Seeking after God. Shallow repentance. God's mercy, grace and patience. More sin. God's punishment. Seeking after God. Shallow repentance. God's mercy, grace, and patience. More sin. In spite of witnessing god's praiseworthy deeds, raining quail like dust, and manna till they had stomach aches, Israel is hard heartedly bent on sin. Verse 32. *In spite of all this, they kept on sinning.* And so God continued to try to get their attention through punishment. Verse 33. *He ends their days in futility and their years in terror.* And it would work for a time. Verse 34. *Whenever God slew them, they would seek him.* But their repentance was shallow, meaningless. Verses 35-36. *But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues, their hearts were not loyal to him.* As one commentator said, "The people's repentance was not an expression of true contrition but was intentionally deceptive. They may have worshiped the Lord

outwardly but not with their hearts. They would flatter him, thinking that they could entice or lure the God of Israel into their schemes, but their every prayer was deceptive. Their deception was expressive of the condition of *their hearts*, which were determined not to be loyal to the Lord."⁷ And so how does God react to this pattern?

- Look at the key verses in this section, verses 38-39. They outline God's response to this repeated cycle. *Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. 39 He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.* Israel's meaningless repentance is contrasted with God's unlimited mercy, grace, and patience.
- I want you to think of God's mercy, grace, and patience as three sides of a prism that refract God's goodness toward his creation. Mercy, grace, and patience are subsets of God's goodness. This description helps with the nuances between the three. "God's mercy means god's goodness toward those in misery and distress."⁸ "God's mercy is his tenderhearted, loving compassion for his people."⁹ "God's grace means God's goodness toward those deserving only punishment."¹⁰ God's grace is often emphasized to those who not deserve God's goodness. "God's patience means God's goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time."¹¹ And all three of these shine through as aspects of God's character in these verses. He gives mercy; he doesn't destroy them and withholds the full extent of his wrath. He gives grace and forgives their sin something they don't deserve. He is patient with them, time after time, not wiping the blemish of their frail existence away forever but remembering that by his patience some may come to true repentance.
- Along with hearing that about his wrath, our children need to hear that God is good. *How great is your goodness, O Lord, which you have stored up for those who fear you.*¹² *The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*¹³ Another unifying thread in scripture is God's goodness in dealing with the problem of sin. Your children need to hear about God's repeated demonstrations of mercy, of grace, and of patience as it relates to your sinfulness. They need to see and hear how God's character intersects with the lives of someone they know. And they need to realize that when they don't feel the full weight of God's displeasure toward their sin it's not because God is silent or can't act or won't act. Instead, it's because God is mercifully, graciously, patiently waiting for them to come to repentance. Romans 2:4 *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*

⁷ VanGemeren, *Expositors*.

⁸ Grudem, p. 200.

⁹ Erickson, p. 295.

¹⁰ Grudem, p. 200.

¹¹ Grudem, p. 200.

¹² Psalm 31:19

¹³ James 5:11

- And it needs to be yakked about from morning till night, around the breakfast table, in the car, at the game, in the field, that the cross of Christ is the greatest demonstration of God's goodness there is. Children need to hear repeatedly and in creative ways how the cross is the way God mediates his grace to a sinful humanity that doesn't deserve God's goodness. *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men in the person of Jesus.*¹⁴ They need to hear how the cross is the way God mercifully chooses to withhold punishment for their sin. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*¹⁵ They need to see how the cross of Christ exemplifies God's never-ending patience. *That is why God had mercy on me, so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.*¹⁶
- So where does that leave us now? Shepherding children into the pasture of a godly heritage in Christ is certainly one of the greatest challenges of life. And next week as we finish our time in Psalm 78 I'm going to highlight how your responsibility as parents fits in with the children's ministry here at church; how are we going to work together so that our children grow up and put their trust in God.

Conclusion

- As we close this morning, I want to challenge you as families to keep a record of God's goodness, of his mercy, grace, and patience for the next month. The book of 1 Samuel reminds us that markers of God's goodness are important. At one particular point during the conflict between Israel and the Philistines, Israel's leader Samuel marked Israel's decisive victory with an Ebenezer as a testimony of God's goodness. 1 Samuel 7:12 *Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, {Ebenezer means stone of help} saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us."*
- Over the next month I challenge your family to take a cookie jar or container of some kind and every time you experience God's goodness, mark it with an Ebenezer. Take a marble or a small stone and put it in the jar as an Ebenezer. And over the next month I want us to hear corporately your stories of God's mercy, grace, and patience. *We will not hide them from our children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.* Pray with me.

¹⁴ Titus 2:11

¹⁵ 1 Peter 1:3

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 1:16 (NLT)