

THE ABOUNDING JOY OF NEW TESTAMENT HOPE - Part ten

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HOPE AND THE GENERATION YET UNBORN - Training the Church in a Life of Hope

Psalm 78:1-8 - "A Maskil of Asaph. Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!^[2] I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old,^[3] things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. ^[4] We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. ^[5] He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children,^[6] that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children,^[7] so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;^[8] and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God."

We should be very interested in the great words of the theme of this passage: **verses 6-7** - "....that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, ^[7] so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments...."

I can't think of a greater or nobler theme for parents, or for a church to live by. What could be more important than to leave this imprint so stamped on our children that they, **and even their children after them**, live life, through thick and thin, putting their hope in God? If there is anyone here who has any genuine devotion to the Lord, if there is anyone who delights in knowing God and loving God and serving God - for anyone like that, if we could be absolutely certain that all **our** children and **their** children would fully and joyfully and lovingly put their hope completely in God, regardless of how much money we have in the bank at the time, we would all die in peace and say, "**Mission accomplished!**"

The Psalm is written by a man called **Asaph**, a Levite who was a music leader - a worship leader - in the service of the king. The Psalm is a long Psalm - 72 verses. And in some ways it's a depressing Psalm. It tells the story of Israel's constant rebellion against the ways of God.

That's why, in the verses we will be studying today, Asaph says the Psalm is full of "**dark sayings**" and "**parables**"⁽²⁾. Some translations include the word "**mysteries**." It's simply a **riddle** how people could be so rebellious against such a delivering and gracious God.

Read it for yourself. The Psalm shows us the **painful reality of sin**. We're forced to look at it more squarely than we would like. And the reason Asaph does this is immediately obvious. He's going to talk about **educating children to hope in God - educating people, both at home and at church, to trust obediently in the goodness and love of God**.

And Asaph warns every parent - every pastor, every teacher - that there is immediately going to be discovered a problem as you educate your children to hope in God. They're all sinners. And because they're all sinners they all naturally **rebel** against the loving, wise ways of God. They got that from you, by the way.

And here's the point. Because of this reality, not just **any** kind of educating process will do. This unique **problem** calls for a unique **remedy**. And that's what this psalm is all about. Let's look at the first eight verses together:

1) THE FOUNDATION OF HOPE IS THE KINDNESS AND CHARACTER OF GOD

Psalm 78:5 - "He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children...."

I know those aren't the first words of the Psalm, but they **explain** the first words of the Psalm. In fact, they explain **many** of the verses of the entire Psalm. **Verse 5** is the **reason** for **verse 4** - "**We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.**"

The first four verses describe the need for a **teaching program** - an **educating** of the people of God. And especially, the **children**.

How is this to be done? **Verse 5** tells us. God has "**established a testimony**" and "**appointed a law**". This is what establishes the foundation to educating a people to hope. If God has not spoken then we have nothing to say. If God

has not spoken we are left adrift on a sea of human speculation and secular reasoning. Churches can spin out their days in media and marketing. It will have no ultimate significance anyway.

There is such a lesson here for all of us. There is more being implied in these early verses than we immediately see. Consider the lesson that people who do not orient lives around the revelation of God **do not know what is good for them or for their children.**

That's why Asaph, in the worship material sung by the whole church, immediately turns our attention to the foundation for all our education efforts in our homes and in our sanctuaries. God has revealed His **will**. He had given a **law** and a **testimony**.

This is the heartbeat of our BLAST children's ministry - "**Building Lives Around Scriptural Truth**"

Now, when Asaph said this, everyone in Israel knew what he was talking about. They would all know about the event in Asaph's mind as he wrote those words. There was a specific time when God gave this law and testimony to Israel: **Exodus 34:28** - "**So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.**"

So Asaph points these people back to the words of the **ten commandments**. But there is something very important to notice about the tables of testimony, or commandments, as they are called. And it's a point that is very central to the rest of this sermon and the message of Asaph in particular.

There is something that is almost universally ignored about the giving of the ten commandments in scripture. Notice the very first words in **Exodus chapter 20**, when the commandments are given to Moses:

Exodus 20:1-2 - "**And God spoke all these words, saying, [2] 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'"**

In other words, the first words of the commandments have nothing whatsoever to do with **law**. They have to do with **mercy** and **unbelievable grace** and **tender, Father-like, delivering care**. With an outstretched arm and a mighty hand, God saved Israel from bondage. And He did all of that **before** He gave them the ten commandments. The tables of testimony don't begin with a testimony about God's demands. They begin with a testimony about God's grace and power revealed on their behalf.

So when Asaph says in **Psalms 78:5** that God has established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, he doesn't just mean that God had given them **things to do**. He means that God has shown what He had **done** for them and what their **response** should be.

Just remember that point for now, because it's going to be very important when we come to study the first four verses of this psalm.

But there's still one other point from **verse 5**:

2) **NOT ONLY DOES GOD ESTABLISH A FOUNDATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN IN HOPE, HE OUTLINES A METHOD**

In other words, God tells us specifically **how** we are to educate people in hope:

Psalms 78:5 - "**He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children....**"

I hope I can make you see how important this next point is. There is something absolutely **critical** being implied. **Those words mean God had no intention to speak to every generation the way He spoke to that generation that came out of Egypt.** There were some unique things that He did with that generation that would not be repeated with any other.

And that implies a direct **responsibility** to a church like ours. It places an immense obligation on the shoulders of **preachers** and **teachers**, and **parents** in general - and **fathers** in particular. I hope all saw that - "**....which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children....**"

There are no back-up plans. Everything depends on this. This isn't something churches **may** do. It's the one thing they **must** do. They must do it or there will be no **hope** (remember, that's our topic in this series) for all the children yet unborn.

Remember, when you set the priorities of your life don't just look at what you can see right here and now. It's not just about your **children** and your **grandchildren**. Our assignment extends further down the road than that. There will be **others**. They're still **unborn**. Your life reaches them for better or for worse.

The only way following generations would learn about those tables of testimony would be for the parents from the one generation to pass the word along to those who followed. Brand it deeply into your soul today. There are just some things that your children **must** learn from you. You can see the indelible logic of this Psalm. If **we** don't pass hope in God along to **our** offspring, there will be **no one** to pass it on to the **next**.

So **two things** come from verse 5. God lays the foundation for all Christian education in His revelation. We simply have nothing else to teach. And then God outlines the method of education. One generation must pass it along to the next.

3) ASAPH RESPONDS TO THE SUMMONS OF GOD WE JUST STUDIED

Now we back up to the first four verses:

Psalm 78:1-4 - "A Maskil of Asaph. Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth![2] I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, [3] things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us.[4] We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done."

Several thoughts come out of these verses:

a) ***Asaph calls on the people to remember the great deeds and works of God.***

Psalm 78:4 - "We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done."

This is why I pointed out from verse 5 that the law and the testimony contained more than just a list of things God wanted them to **do**. There are divine **commands**, to be sure. And Asaph will get to them, but that's not the starting point.

Asaph calls the people to remember God's **mighty delivering deeds**. He's reminding them of things like the plagues that turned Pharaoh's heart back in Egypt. The frogs, the water turning to blood, the flies and gnats, the hail and darkness, the crossing of the Red Sea, the manna and quail, the water from the rock.

These were mighty manifestations of God's power. But there is still a huge problem. The children addressed by Asaph weren't there to see them. They simply weren't born yet. And these were different days in Israel. Love was growing cold. So Asaph calls the parents to a full-blooded assignment: "Remind our children, so **they** can remind **their** children. Life doesn't just happen. **There's a reason they aren't slaves in Egypt today!** Their God is an awesome God. Make sure they learn these truths from your lips!"

But there's still something else interesting in these first four verses:

b) ***Asaph uses strange words to describe his message.***

Psalm 78:2 - "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old...."

Some of your translations will say "**mysteries**" instead of "**parables**." But the idea is the same. He's trying to say, "**There is something strange to notice here - something mysterious, something very unusual and hard to explain.**"

Asaph is saying there are **two things** that just don't make sense when you look at Israel's dealings with God in the past:

First, ***there is the repetition of human rebellion and wickedness in spite of all of the blessings they received.*** He points this out clearly in **verses 40-41** - “***How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! [41] They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel.***”

And second, ***the other amazing mystery was that God continued gracious to them even when they weren't faithful to Him.*** This is shown in **verse 38** - “***Yet he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath.***” And I'll tell you why these two points are important. Remember where we are. We're talking about ***educating a people to hope.*** We've talked about the foundation of God's mighty acts and His revealed commands. And Asaph says when you look at God's mighty working among His people you are stunned by two mysteries - two parables that are hard to explain:

First, ***there is the people's repeated wickedness even when they knew better.*** Even when they were given the best advantage of God's will and way, they still persisted in sin.

And second, ***he outlines the amazing record of God's grace.*** These people didn't deserve it. They would have worn out any leader's patience. But through all of their history, God's mercy shines like a diamond, undiminished by a mountain of human wickedness.

Do you see what Asaph is doing? It's very important. First, he's saying that preachers and parents and teachers need to ***take sin very seriously when they educate their children.*** O, how many churches don't get this anymore. You can't ***magnify grace*** until you've ***accentuated sin.*** Churches can't just gloss over the fall in every person's heart or they will just start ***doling out information*** like knowledge in itself would solve the problem.

So the teaching on sin is to ***humble us and bring us to an end of self-trust.*** Until we are brought to ***hopelessness of self*** we will never be brought to ***hope through the cross of God's grace.***

Then, after the self comes to ***feel the weight of sin*** the teaching on ***mercy*** is to birth hope in our hearts. Remind the people, says Asaph, that God's mercies are ***durable*** mercies. They stand strong in the face of repeated failure. When there is no room whatsoever for ***self-confidence*** there is always room for ***God-confidence.***

Now we come to the last three verses of our text:

4) **THE GOAL OF ALL SCRIPTURAL TRAINING IN HOPE**

Psalm 78:6-8 - “***....that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, [7] so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; [8] and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.***”

Here are the closing lessons:

- a) ***We must instill in our children a knowledge of God - Psalm 78:6*** - “***That the next generation might know them...***”

I thought as I was preparing this how fitting it would be to take just those seven words and have them on the door or every nursery room, every children's church room, every Christian Education class, and probably right over every entrance to this sanctuary - “***That the next generation might know!***”

And even the children ***yet unborn!*** There's so much at stake here! You won't be around to even ***see*** your children's children's children. But grab on to this great Bible soaked thought. ***You still have a hand in teaching them!***

Parents, please hear me. The next time you just don't feel like getting out of bed for church after a late or busy Saturday, the next time you're just too tired to come back to church on Sunday night, ***I urge you to remember these words! There is no easy way to confront this massive question. Is your temporary comfort, or your social life, or a few minutes more sleep - are those things really worth the future of***

scores and scores of people's spiritual development? Do you really want to be the weak link in the chain that pulls people into heaven?

That's what Asaph is calling these people to remember. There's a desperate shortage of a true knowledge of God in the church today. So much of what many churches do has absolutely nothing distinctly Christian about it. There is nothing distinctly Christian about teaching life skills to our children. Everybody wants to make life as full and rich as possible for their children. Every person alive wants to increase the knowledge of their offspring.

But Asaph is talking about the **knowledge of God**. More and more, we must remember what the roots of Christian hope are. And where it will come from for future generations. It has become very fashionable in recent years to fill the curriculum up with teaching people how to rid their lives of worry. How to overcome stress. How to improve your self-image and rid your life of crippling emotional baggage.

Now all of that may have good elements in it. **But none of it is the same as what Asaph is insisting on in these verses.** Remember, our primary calling isn't merely to increase the general knowledge of life skills. **We're here to increase the knowledge of God - a knowledge of what He has revealed about Himself.**

Hear God's Word calling to you, calling to us - to our church - calling us to remain true to our calling as the people of God. Nothing else is as important as this!

- b) **Second, the impartation of the knowledge of God is to lead children to hope in God - Psalm 78:6-7 - "....that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, [7] so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; [8] and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God."**

"That they should set their hope in God"(7). What a marvellous phrase. What a great prayer! Again, this is a distinctly Christian concept. We're not talking about creating more hopeful children in general. This isn't about creating a bright outlook on life or a sunnier disposition, or a better image of themselves in this world.

In fact, Asaph isn't talking about an emotional hope at all. He's talking about a **spiritual, eternal hope**. He's talking about the way we all **line our lives up with the object(s) of our hope**. That's because we all **sync our lives to the ultimate object of our hope**.

That's why training a people to **hope in God** produces holy, kingdom oriented disciples - **1 John 3:3 - "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."** Don't let familiarity with this text blind you to its obvious message. It's not bare **doctrine** that produces inward holiness. It's not even just their **religious affiliation**. It's their **hope**. It's what they're **banking on** in life, and what they're **longing for**, and what they **can't wait for**, and what they just **can't get enough of!** That's what fuels inward purity in a corrupt and warped world.

Here's a very important question to ask yourself. What do your children, even if not your own children, then the children around you in this church, because your life feeds theirs all the time - **what does your life teach the children about where to put their hope?**

That's a huge question. Because it's certain they can't easily be taught to put their hope in God if they see me putting my hope in wealth, or education or success, or achievement. And I mustn't put my hope there because none of these touches the problem of human sin and wickedness and the judgement to come.

Earthly hopes will all vanish like mist by the road. But the Bible says those who **hope in the Lord will never be put to shame!**

- c) **Finally, the goal of educating a generation in hope is to cause them to obey God - Psalm 78:7 - "....so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments...."**

If you've never considered it before, I urge you to notice it here. There's an **order** to Asaph's words. And it explains the emptiness of so many efforts in terms of genuine spiritual transformation. Children must learn

from us to ***hope in God before they will want to obey Him***. You can't start in like a bull in a china shop trying to force your children to obey God just because you're bigger than they are.

Because we are sinners - remember, I talked about the importance of remembering sin? - ***because*** we are sinners, we all ***resent*** authority, as ***bare*** authority over our lives. This applies to how we train people in general and children in particular. You must teach ***love*** for God, ***hope*** in God, ***confidence*** in God so their little hearts, being shown by example not to trust in themselves, are primed to look to a loving Father in heaven who is merciful and just and faithful to a thousand generations.

And hearts that long for - that ***hope in*** - these things will be far quicker to press on in joyful obedience.

May God give all of us the wisdom and strength so that in our homes, in our classes, in our church, we model and teach a knowledge of God in such a way that the next generation, and children yet unborn, might put their hope in God!