

## **“PASS IT ON”**

### ***Psalm 78:1-8***

*Psalm 78* is probably one of those Psalms that we don't look at very often. It's quite long, for one thing. It doesn't have too many snappy, memorable phrases. As far as I know, it hasn't been turned into a worship song. And most of it (vv9-72) is about how awful God's people were in the early years of their nationhood, between the time they left Egypt and the reign of King David, and how God responded to that. We don't like to read about a lot of smiting, really, do we?

However, the opening lines are well worth reflecting on – that's the section we read this morning. Let me read a bit of it again in Eugene Peterson's *The Message* version:

*“We're not keeping this to ourselves,  
we're passing it along to the next generation—  
God's fame and fortune,  
the marvellous things he has done ...  
So the next generation would know ...  
Know the truth and tell the stories  
so their children can trust in God,  
Never forget the works of God.”*

I know that the Shepherd's Crook Puppet Theatre have long seen these words as a mandate for their work in primary schools, and as we are asking God's blessing on young Toby in our 11.00am service today, it seemed appropriate to think of these words and remind ourselves of what God asks us to do as his people. They apply not only to those who are called to share the gospel with schoolchildren and those whose children are still young, but to all of us as we have contact with children and young people here and in other places.

You see, what we believe about God and his ways is of utmost importance to us as that affects all that we do in our lives. Whatever our beliefs, wherever we choose to put our trust, will influence the way we live our lives – it will set our priorities and govern our behaviour and attitudes. If we say we believe in God, then that will, of necessity, make a difference to us. It's the foundation of our lives and the basis of our hopes for the future. And that applies to us personally and corporately. The Psalmist in this case is Asaph who was one of Korah's sons and a member of the priestly family who had some responsibility for the choir in worship. And Asaph says that we should not hide what we believe about God from others, particularly our children. There's none of this “Let them make up their own minds” – if you don't tell them, they can't anyway. Nor is there any holding back because “we don't want to give any offence or put anyone off”. Let's not keep it to ourselves, he says, but pass it on – pass on that faith and the stories behind it – to the next generation.

Particularly, he says, tell them about ***“the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD”***. Tell your children about God's blessings. Point out those things that are part of what he is and does. Tell them about his work in creation when you're out walking. Explain the meaning of the rainbow. Say grace with them before meals as a way of helping them see that what they have has been provided by a generous God. Help them to thank God at the end of the day in simple prayers for God's goodness and protection for them during the day. Weave what you believe about God into your conversation and all that you do. In his book *Mission Implausible*, Duncan MacLaren argues that children will pick up on what their parents seem to see as plausible and it will become part of their worldview too. Make God an obvious part of your lives and show that he is important – indeed, vital – to you.

Remind them, too, about ***his power***. Acknowledge God's supremacy over everything, including your own life. And, in the context of this Psalm, acknowledge his desire to deal with evil, his awesome holiness. As we've said, the rest of this Psalm details how God dealt with his people as they turned away from him again and again. It's not easy reading, but it does help to emphasise that God is a holy God who wants his people, those who say that they follow him, to live lives of purity and righteousness. Again, it's one of those things

we don't talk about much in case we put people off, but without a proper appreciation of just how much God detests evil, we lose out on a vital aspect of his character and an understanding of why he acts as he does.

And the way he acts as he does is in *doing wonders*. God has got involved in the lives of his people in all kinds of ways. The whole of the Bible is the narrative of his miracles, and of his intervention in the life of this world to try and restore it to the state which he originally intended for it. Supremely, that was accomplished some centuries after Asaph's song, when Jesus came into our world. Now there's a wonder! God himself, coming into our world as a fragile, vulnerable human being – coming to show us how to live to get the best out of God's world; coming to transform the lives of those who needed to re-encounter God in their lives; coming to free men and women from the influence and consequences of sin; coming to demonstrate decisively and dramatically just how much he loves us.

And the great climax of that was, of course, the Easter weekend. At the cross, on Good Friday, Jesus took on himself all the forces of evil, standing in for us as they did their worst to win the battle for our souls, and sacrificing all that he had and was so that we could be reunited with the God whom we had rejected. And then, a couple of days later, the greatest wonder of them all, as he burst out of the tomb to show us that absolutely nothing – not even death – can stand in the way of our receiving the love that God has for us and the eternal destiny he has planned for us. If that not's a wonder to pass on to the next generation, then what on earth is?

Pass it on, says Asaph. Tell your children about it. Live it out in your own life and be prepared to tell other people why you do that. And pass it on so that the next generation will also "*put their trust in God*" (v7). Encourage them to live their lives on the foundation that you do. Help them to see the benefits – both now and for eternity – of trusting in God. Then they, too, will "*not forget his deeds*" and, just as importantly, will "*keep his commands*". They are to thank God for all that he done and is doing, but also commit themselves to living in a way that will reflect his values of justice and righteousness, that will glorify God and help those around us who are struggling. In many ways the rest of Asaph's poem is a chronicle of God smiting people who don't do as he wants, but as we emphasise God's praiseworthy deeds, his power and his wonders, we can help the next generation to see that God really does want us to get the best out of the life he has given us. Weave the story of Jesus into that – along with your own testimonies of God's goodness – and you will be encouraging the next generation – and generations to come (v6) – to see just what an amazing God we serve.

Remind yourselves frequently and regularly of God's awesome greatness, then share it with those of the next generation – your own children and those you come into contact with here at church or in the ministries to which some of you have been called – because they may not have the opportunity if hearing it from anyone else. Just like Asaph, we worship a great God, so let's share what it means to us with everyone we can, whatever their age.

### **For reflection and discussion**

- 1) Why might we be tempted to hide our faith from others (v4)?
- 2) In what ways can we ensure that the next generation hears about God and his ways?
- 3) The rest of the Psalm is clearly intended as a warning to God's people about the consequences of going against God? How might we express that in our contemporary situation?
- 4) To what extent should we be teaching children to "*keep his commands*"? How might we do that?
- 5) Spend some time praying for the Shepherd's Crook Puppet Theatre, for the Lichfield Schools' Work Trust, for Urban Saints and for the parents of young children in our church.