

## ***Singing It Out Across the Generations***

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Joyful Noise Choir

## **Psalm 78:1-16**

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Dear family of God,

In our culture today, you are likely to hear about generation gaps. Did you know that the elderly who are born before 1926 are called “the greatest generation”? There might be just a few of those people here today. The youngest ones are 94! If you are more than 94 years old, raise your hand! Bill Groot?? Then there’s the “silent generation,” born between 1927 and 1945. If that’s you, raise your hand. That is a large chunk of people here today, many of you also at Emmanuel Home—raise your hand over there too. We’re watching! 😊. Next is the Baby Boomers. Raise your hand if you are born between 1945 and 1964. How about the Gen-Xers—people born between 1965 and 1980? Then the Millennials, born between 1981 and 2000? Hands up! And finally everyone else—everyone 19 years old and younger. Gen Z. You’re all young and energetic! Raise your hands. That’s everyone in the choir and many others.

Differences exist between us. I don’t think we can ignore differences between age groups. Each generation has their own stories, songs, passions, interests, and concerns. Generation gaps in that sense are real. There are differences in interests and styles and passions. And that’s okay! But do you know what unites us all? Psalm 78 tells us its our story. We are connected by the story of our salvation.

So the call of Psalm 78 is to pass our story on faithfully from generation to generation. That’s the clear message of v.4:

*Ps 78:4 We will not hide them from their children;  
(The “them” are things we read about in v.3  
—the things we learned from our ancestors. V.4 continues)  
we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,  
his power, and the wonders he has done.*

So we’ve got the former generations in v.3 who taught the current generation and the current generation is telling the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.

### **Negative Lessons**

The first thing this psalm teaches us is to remember the negative examples: the lessons learned by looking at those who did not do what God says. You see, if you read v.2, the writer says,

*Ps 78:2 I will open my mouth in parables,  
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—*

The English word *parables* here refers to *mashal* in Hebrew. And *mashal* means comparisons. That’s like Jesus’ parables where he says, “The Kingdom of God is like....” And then he talks, for example, about a mustard seed (Mt 13:31) to show how the kingdom grows from something small into something huge and lifegiving. In Psalm 78, the people of Judah are urged not to become like their brothers and sisters in Israel. Israel is a negative parable for Judah.

You see, Psalm 78 is written more to Judah. In case you don't know, Israel and Judah are sisters, two parts of the nation that generally is called Israel as a whole. But Psalm 78 seems to be written at a time when the kingdom was divided. Israel—the northern 10 tribes—was not following the Lord anymore. Meanwhile Judah—the other 2 tribes—was slipping in their faithfulness and heading down the same road that Israel had already travelled.

The psalm says the people of Israel did not remain faithful in instructing their children. In v.8 it says do not be “like their forefathers... whose spirits were not faithful to” the Lord. And then in v.9 he mentions “the men of Ephraim (another name for Israel)... [who] forgot what the Lord had done.” Those two historical examples of faithlessness are parables for the people of Judah. They must take those negative examples to heart and not let themselves repeat the errors of their sisters and brother in Israel.

That's the parables. Learn the negative lessons of failure. Judah, don't be like your wayward sister Israel.

### **Positive Lessons**

Next, the teacher writing Psalm 78 says, *I will utter hidden things, things from of old....* He's not talking about secrets. He's talking about the things that he himself learned from the older generation as they passed on the faith. These are positive lessons for people to follow. These “lesson could be hidden from those who are uninstructed” but they don't have to be. The lessons must be shared or else those important details of our story will be missed.

God is saying, “Some of you have good stories to tell; don't keep them secret! Share them to feed the heart and soul of the next generation.”

I think many of us can look back on our grandparents and parents and give thanks that they passed on the faith by telling us how God did for them what he did for his people of long ago. They utter things of long ago—truth and stories from the Bible—but they add the way they have experienced that truth in their own lives. Those are positive examples.

Now let's ask: Why should we remember the negative stories of those who failed to follow the Lord? And why should we share the stories of God's faithfulness in the past and our experiences of his work in the present? Here's why: to encourage faithfulness to God.

### **Encouraging Faithfulness**

Psalm 78 tells Judah to pull up her spiritual socks. It encourages faithfulness among the people of God. You've perhaps heard the saying, “Those who do not study history are destined to repeat its mistakes”? Psalm 78 is telling Judah, “Look at your history and understanding what it means so you can pass on the stories of God's faithfulness.” This psalm recounts the Lord's covenant with Israel as a whole. The Lord is saying to Judah, “If you remember what I've done for you and walk with me, you'll be blessed. But if you don't remember and you go and chase after idols like your siblings in

the north, there will be 'hell' to pay." Parts of Psalm 78 remind us what happened when Israel did not walk with the Lord.

Looking at the past should remind Israel and Judah to get reconnected to the God of their ancestors who brought them out of bondage in Egypt. And understanding how intimately they are connected to their covenant-making and covenant-keeping God is vital.

I remember when I was in Israel 5 years ago, our tour guide was trying to teach us the way Jewish people understand their history. So when a rabbi says to Jews—even today—"Who came out of Egypt?", the wrong answer is "Our ancestors." The right answer is, "We all did!" Shall we try that, boys and girls? You're sitting on the floor so nicely. When I say, "Who came out of Egypt?" what will you say? (We all did!) Let's try it. "Who came out of Egypt? WE ALL DID! Louder! Great. That teaching technique is about staying connected to our past and knowing that the past should shape the present. If you know you're part of a people who were freed from slavery, you must cherish your freedom. And if you really cherish it, you'll talk about it! You talk about what you value! You'll talk about the deliverance and the Deliverer!

### **Pointing to Jesus**

And that brings us to the heart of what we must talk about in our generations on this side of the cross. Israel of old was called to remember that God brought them out of bondage in Egypt. We must remember that we've been delivered from bondage to sin through Jesus alone.

As Christians, we have an obligation, a duty and a sacred trust to point our children to Jesus, our deliverer. And that "our" is intergenerational.

In some Christian circles they make a really big deal out of knowing the exact date of your rebirth. If you can't say the time when you confessed Jesus as your Saviour, then it must not have been very real to you.

There are a lot of reasons why that's bad theology but I won't get into except to say that the right answer to the question, "When were you saved?" is "When Jesus died on the cross for my sins!" An even better question is "When were WE saved?" Or "Who came out of bondage to sin when Jesus rose from the dead?" We all did! Again. Who came out of bondage to sin when Jesus rose from the dead? We all did! Yes, that our story. And each generation must learn how to tell the next generations, not only that Jesus is your Saviour and the Saviour of all God's people; we must also work at sharing how his love and grace have touched our lives personally, even 2000 years after the actual event that saved us.

Jesus is still alive. He's still on the throne. He still ruling over our lives from heaven. He's still saving us from our sin. Still helping us. My parents helped me see how much they loved Jesus because he saved them from their sins. But they also testified how they trusted Jesus as Lord when my Dad had a heart attack at 45 years old and almost died. They also testified—by word and example—that they trusted Jesus when my Mom broke her neck in a car accident at age 57 and lived the next 28 years in a

wheelchair before God called her Home. I get to testify to my kids and grandkids how Jesus saved me. Helped me understand his grace to cover all my sins when I was about 20. He has helped me serve him and the church for over 25 years. He saved my daughter from a near fatal brain bleed in 2018. Those are just parts of my story. I need to tell it!

And you need to tell yours! Point the next generation to Jesus our deliverer!

## **Sing it Out**

Now we come to the reason I called this sermon, "Singing it Out Across the Generations." I had to tie it in to singing with the Joyful Noise Choir here. Seriously, the psalms were intended to be sung by the people of old. And I think that's because we tend to remember what we sing from the heart.

I can't tell you how many times in my years of ministry I've seen elderly people with dementia singing. They sometimes forget things and can't even put a sentence together anymore. Sometimes they haven't talked in years. But when you start to sing a song that they learned as children, suddenly words return. They join right in with singing. The song lives on. The truth that has been impressed on their hearts as children lives deep down in their being and can't be erased. The comfort of belonging to Jesus "sings" out from their lips when nothing else will come out anymore!

So, parents, sing to your little ones. Sing with them. Impress on them the truth of God's saving love for us in the songs you sing with them. It will feed their souls for the rest of their lives. Teach the praiseworthy deeds of God through pointing them to Jesus in your telling of the history of God's people because it's our history, regardless of what generation we are. Tell how Jesus has touched your own life personally. And sing the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord our God out loud.

Let's take the message of Psalm 78 to heart. It reminds us that as human beings we can easily take God for granted and forget him. But we praise him for his faithfulness. Our great God prevails over our faithlessness! He can be trusted always and forever. Sing it out! Live out of his victory for us in Jesus!