

Date of sermon: 10/16/2021
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Psalm 78
Title of Sermon: The Reach of the Church
Series: The Bride - #6

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78 My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. **2** I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old— **3** things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. **4** We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. **5** He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, **6** so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. **7** Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. **8** They would not be like their ancestors— a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him. **9** The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; **10** they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. **11** They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them. **12** He did miracles in the sight of their ancestors in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan. **13** He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand up like a wall. **14** He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. **15** He split the rocks in the wilderness 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.

17 But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the wilderness against the Most High. **18** They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. **19** They spoke against God; they said, "Can God really spread a table in the wilderness? **20** True, he struck the rock, and water gushed out, streams flowed abundantly, but can he also give us bread? Can he supply meat for his people?" **21** When the LORD heard them, he was furious; 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** Human beings 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 by his power made the south wind blow. **27** He rained meat down on them like dust, birds like sand on the seashore. **28** He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. **29** They ate till they were gorged— he had given them what they craved. **30** But before they turned from what they craved, even while the food 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. **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.

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Well, this wraps up kind of what we call Part One of our series, The Bride. Next week, again, as Pastor Jim mentioned to you, we're going to have some dear friends from the Steiger Ministries. David will be here. One of his sons, Ben, and also one of the brothers that came to Christ through their ministry in Brazil, is also going to be here sharing. So, we look forward to that. And then, we're going to pick it up after that, and The Bride Meets Godzilla. That is -- the four great challenges that the church faces today. The bride and the challenges that she faces: pluralism, and a number of other things that are in front of us. So, today we kind of finish up Part One.

I have never met a parent -- I suppose they're out there -- I've never met a parent that doesn't have desires for their children. In fact, I think I could probably give you the top ten, all of us together could come up with easily the top ten. And that is, those things that those parents want for their kids. Not in priority, but -- most parents want their kids to move out and stay out. Generally speaking. In other words, to be financially stable. Yes. I think most parents, unless they believe that their child is called to celibacy, want their kids to find a really good mate. I know of tons of parents that literally prayed every day until their child got married. I think a lot of parents pray for a good job. They pray for financial stability. They pray for grandkids. But of

all the things, there's nothing that compares to the one thing that I think every Christian parent prays for. And that is -- the prayer of 3 John 1:4: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." There's nothing. There's really nothing that compares to it. In fact, I guarantee you -- Christian parents. Not those who claim to be Christians -- Christian parents. I would bet the house -- and I'm not a betting man -- I would bet the house that I could not find a Christian parent that would exchange worldly wealth for the fact that their child knows God. There's not one. There's not a parent that I've ever met -- that is a Christian parent -- that would trade that. That would say, "Yup. I want my kid to be stable, good marriage, wonderful job, financially independent, and I'll forfeit their eternal life." I do not know one. That's why John said, "I've no greater joy than to hear that my children" -- he's speaking of spiritual children at that point -- "are walking in the truth." That's their passion.

It's not just new with our generation. It's not something that just came on the scene. For my entire life, I have heard parents -- the most guttural prayers I've ever heard in my life are parents sitting in my office praying that their prodigal children would come back. Those are the prayers where they stop praying because words can't come because the emotions overwhelm them. It's the prayer that they would come back and give their life to Christ. And the reason is because every parent, the day they give birth to a child, in that moment becomes a missionary. Think about that for a moment. Every parent, the day their child is born, at that point becomes a missionary. What's a missionary? A person sent to another group, to another people group, to evangelize them. With the hopes that the people God has sent to them -- or them to -- would come to faith in Christ. The day that any parent gives birth to a child is the day that that parent is, yes, a parent, but is at its core a missionary. And that's why their fundamental prayer is, "God, would you save my child?" They pray, "Lord, open their eyes." They pray, "God, help them to see you." They pray, "God, make your life and life with you real to my child." "God, help them to fall in love with the Word of God. Help them, Lord, not to be bored with it, help them not to be inoculated to God because of the church, or anything else." Why do we pray that prayer? Because, if you're a parent, you're a missionary. And the day any church opens a nursery, they've decided to be missionaries to the next generation. And the day any church starts an AWANA program, they have said -- "We're gonna be missionaries to the next generation." And the day they start, and they hire a youth pastor, or they recruit somebody in the church to start a youth ministry -- that's the day that church has said, "We want to be missionaries."

And that's why I want to close with this text, because this text is talking about the very thing that we want to close with, and that is this -- raising up the next generation of Christians is a burden that we all must carry. Raising up the next generation of Christians is a burden that we all must carry. And if you have chosen to have children, from that point on you're a missionary. You've joined the ranks. You probably won't leave this country. You may not even leave this city. But you're a missionary to the next generation. And if you're going to belong to the church, and if you're going to belong to the people of God, maybe you never thought this way, and maybe you never signed up for this, but today, you're going to be accountable to this text. And that is, the day that you began to operate within the body of Christ is the day that you joined a mission organization. It's called the church, and its target is the next generation. Why? Because the text of Scripture says, "Oh, my people, hear my teaching and listen to the words of my mouth."

Asaph is giving us a prayer. It is a prayer, as is the vast majority of the Psalms. They are prayers, almost exclusively for the body of Christ -- for the church, for the people of God. There are some of them that are for the choir, and there are a variety of things. They come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. There are prayers of provision, there are prayers of thanksgiving, there are prayers of lament, where they're weeping. There are prayers of complaint. Psalm 13, Psalm 12. I love those, those are incredible -- "God, how long do I have to look at the back of your head? Turn around! Listen to me!" They are psalms of complaint. They teach you how to complain to God. And you say, "I don't think I need any help." Well -- you get better at it. There are imprecatory psalms. These are some of my favorites. They are. They teach me sometimes the prayers of God -- "Call down sulfur and fire on those who refuse to listen to your word." They're curses. You say, "Pastor -- that's not a prayer." Ohhh -- come to my study, I'll teach you the imprecatory psalms. They teach you how to lament. They teach you how to praise. They exhort you to dance, and they teach you about the responsibility of the people of God. And in this text, "I will open my mouth in parables -- for what purposes? He decreed statutes for Jacob" -- verse 5 -- "and established the law in Israel which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children." So -- why? "That the next generation would know them. Even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children."

See, his passion is that every generation cultivates faith in the next one. That's our privilege, that's our assignment. Every generation is to cultivate faith in the next generation. It's as common as having children. It's to pray. But the fun thing about this one is, this is not an individual prayer. This is not a prayer you pray at home. It says it's a maskil of Asaph. It's something for the church. It's something to be prayed in church. And it's kind of interesting, because it's both a prayer and kind of preaching. He's preaching -- and sometimes -- I don't really like it when people do that, but here's one that I have to confess is one of those. It's a prayer where he's preaching during the prayer, and he teaches you about what? What is the process of passing your faith to the next generation? If you're gonna have children, this text needs to be tattooed on your head. If you're gonna be joining a church, this needs to be tattooed on the church's head.

What's the frame of reference of this prayer? Number one, it's a prayer for remembrance. It's a prayer of remembering. Going back. Looking at our faith in the past. From the mothers and the fathers and the grandfathers. It goes back, and it talks about the men of Ephraim that armed with bows and turned their -- turned on the day of battle, and they did not keep God's covenant. It goes on, and then it says in verse 12: "He did miracles in the sight of their fathers and the land of Egypt and the region of Zoan. He divided the sea and led them through." What's the writer -- what's Asaph doing? He's walking them down the story of God's work in their life.

If you've ever been to a bar mitzvah, this is what they do. It's really beautiful. We don't have anything like it in the protestant church. I wish we did. The bar mitzvah always starts at creation. So, here's the little 12-year-old child that is going to be, if you will, transitioned into adulthood. Where do they begin? Every time? They don't begin with a child. And here's the reason why. The focus of the story is not the child. You see, in our day, we make everything about the child, and the child has been trained for 18 years by the time they leave our home,

"It's all about me!" Not in the Jewish faith. They start with Genesis and they start about God. And they narrate down through the story, and clearly, they are about the Exodus. They're about the delivery. And they keep walking until in the midst of this bar mitzvah they come to the moment where there's a child. And that child only understands their life when they understand it in the story of God's work. That child has no meaning by itself. It only has meaning when it understands where I fit in the story of God. The work of God has come before me, and the work of God will come after me. The work of God will come after me. The work of God that comes before me is passed on to me. It's given to me by my father, by my mother, by my aunt, and by my uncle. You see, God's been working. We call it Prevenient grace, that grace that has been working before you ever showed up. And that's what Asaph is telling us. If you want to pass your faith on, what you do first with your children is, you take them back.

When they came through the Jordan, God parted the water. What did He tell them to do? "I want you to build an altar." Tells us this in Deuteronomy. For what purpose? "When your children ask," the text says, "then you will be able to tell them what I did on this day." In other words, live your life in such a way that it provokes questions in your children's heart. Live your life in such a way that it stirs up questions, and then you can tell them, "Let me tell you about the time that your mom and I didn't have any money." "Can I tell you about the time that we spent the night in the hospital with you? And they said you weren't gonna live. And dad laid on your chest. And he wouldn't go home. And he never fell asleep. And he prayed." "Can I tell you the time..." and the story goes on and on and on. It is a public prayer. It's a prayer of remembrance. And the reality is, I think most of us could point to a person who's made a huge difference in our life. Do your children know their names?

I think if you were to ask my kids, "Give me the top three men that have touched my dad's life," I think they could be able to tell you. Do your kids know yours? Do they know the people that shaped you? Do they know the people that led you to Christ? Do they know the people that taught you to pray? Have you told them about when your faith became real? You see, that's what Asaph is doing. He's walking them down. "God did miracles in the sight of our fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan. He guided us with a cloud by day and with a light from the fire by night. And he split -- there was a day where, man, God split the rocks in the desert, and He gave water in abundance." What stories do you tell your children? Do you tell them of the big elk that you shot? Or do you tell them of the witch that you led to Christ, that renounced her faith and stopped cutting and turned her life to Christ? Do you tell them of your fishing expeditions? Or do you tell them of the woman that your mom brought home who was a prostitute, and she moved her in. And you led her to Christ. And she never made another dollar selling her body. What do you tell them? Because the way you pass faith to the next generation is not by telling them of the things of this world, but telling them of your encounters with God. It's a prayer of remembrance, but it's also a prayer of responsibility.

We are to teach our children. Why? So that the next generation would know them -- even the children yet to be born -- and that they in turn would tell their children. You see, again, let's remind ourselves. This is not a prayer for parents at home. It applies there, yes. It's a prayer for the church. It's a prayer that testifies to the work of God and declares the glory of God. And it talks about the things that God has done. It's a sacred trust. It's a trust that we've been given.

It's one of the reasons why, in this last year -- and we knew it was gonna be difficult, and it still is. I spent the afternoon talking with a dear brother in our church, who happens to work in a certain school. And he was telling me about a person who just quit this week. Just walked off the job. "I can't do this." Overwhelmed. And one of the things that we thought you needed to be reminded of is the story of God's goodness. And so, we started this jar. And every rock in that jar is put there by somebody who said, "I've seen God work." It's been one of the great joys of my life this past year to sit just about where Pastor Jim is sitting, and to walk people come up, sometimes in the middle of worship. I watched a dad walk up there one time. And he put that rock in there. I knew what was behind that story. His son was fighting for his life. Still is. I watched a woman walk up there. She was separated from her husband. It was a prayer of thanksgiving to God, but it was also a rock of faith -- "I will trust you in the midst of this." All year long, I've watched people walk up there. And I hope there are a lot of kids who came by and said, "Mom and dad, what are those psychedelic rocks doing in that tube?" That's like an altar for us. And it's our privilege and our responsibility to tell our kids about the hand of God. The pleasure of God. That's our prayer.

What are we to do? We're to tell them about the stories of God's acts. Ancient Israel used stories. That was their assignment. That's what they did. Deuteronomy says, "As you rise and as you go to bed and as you walk along the road, what are you to do? You're to teach them and to remind them." I'm not against personal devotional time at home. I just don't think it's quite as effective as teaching them in the morning, teaching them at noon, teaching them in the evening, teaching them when you drive. Teaching them when you're walking around the block. You see, what the Jewish family believed was -- "We're not going to isolate the education of our children to a moment in time. We're gonna tell them stories throughout the day." "Can I tell you the time that I was walking home and I felt lost? Just like we are right now, son." "Can I tell you the time that I thought I was gonna freeze to death, and die, and I gave my life to Christ for the 759th time? Just like you wanna do right now, because you think you're gonna die." All of those are just stories that we have. And the reality is, the Scripture tells us Asaph teaches us.

One of the great privileges of the church is to not just teach the Scriptures, but to tell stories. Now, some people think, "Oh, that's just story time, and that's not as good as teaching the Scriptures." Well, let me tell you -- let me give you just a little insight. To the Jewish mind, telling the stories of God's great work was teaching them. Telling them the stories about the exodus was teaching them. Telling them the story about one of their favorite kings and the day that he would not stand for anyone standing between the people of God and the promises of God, and so, that little king by the name of David walked out there with a couple of stones in his pouch, and a sling, and was offended by a nine-foot giant who thought he was more important than the promise of God. "Can I tell you the story about the time that a woman came to the king, and she knocked on the door, and this lady came, and she came in, and she discovered that when she came, that was the very moment, the unbelievable timing of God."

"Can I teach you about the providence of God? Can I tell you the time that your mom and I opened our home for a lady to come live with us, because we thought that she needed somebody to care for her? And a few months later, your sister was born. And she had a hole in

her heart. And we were gonna need to be in the hospital every day for two months. And God knew in advance that we needed a nanny to live in our home, to take care of you so that Mom and I could be at the hospital. Can I tell you why I trust God? It's because He's shown up."

If we're gonna pass our faith to the next generation, we need to tell them the stories of God's acts, and we need to teach them God's truth. At the age of six, every little child, every little boy, would be taken down to the rabbi, and the rabbi would teach them the book of the law. It's the first five books of the Old Testament. He would teach them the customs of the Jewish nation. He would teach them their beliefs. And, like a necklace around their neck, he would place something around them that reminded them, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night. For, when you are faithful to obey it, your life will be prosperous, and you will succeed." Those are the words of God to Joshua. And those are the words of Joshua to us. "This book of the law shall not depart from us. We should meditate on it day and night." Why? For then you will be successful. Then you will be successful. Teach them. Command them.

When I was a little kid, we used to have Sunday School pins. We don't give those out anymore. It's kinda cheesy -- I wish we did. My mom was single. She had a thousand reasons to sleep in every Sunday morning. Why? Because she had three jobs that she did every week. Not one, not two -- three. And every Sunday morning, she got me up, and let me tell you what -- I had a pin of faithful attendance at that church. From my chest it went down to my knee. That was not a testimony to me. I'd have been sleeping. I would've been meditating on the back of my eyelids. But she got me up, she marched me down there. I walked by Mrs. Hibner, and she would pinch my cheeks -- that's why they're red today. And she would be at the back door, and she would pinch my cheeks, and she would grab me and she would look me in the face and she would tell me, "I'm praying for you." Didn't mean anything until I discovered the power of prayer, and then I realized, probably the reason I'm alive is because Mrs. Hibner prayed for me.

I commend those of you who, over the years, faithfully got your kids and your grandkids to church. Why? Because we now partner together. Remind yourself -- this is a prayer. Not to mom and dad for home -- this is a prayer for the church. You see, the church, when it opens its doors to have a nursery, it says, "We wanna be a missionary to the next generation. And we're not partnering with ourselves, we're not into this thing ourselves, we're into this with every family who gets their kids here, who comes on Wednesday night." I'm sure you're like me -- there are some nights when I'm thinking to myself, "I just want to go home. I plead to God, send a snowstorm." But the reality is, when you get here, and your child gets the Word of God put into their heart, and you've been memorizing through the week -- you're giving something to the Holy Spirit to work with the rest of your child's life. Tell them the stories of God's acts, and teach them the glory of God's truth. And when you go home, please don't ask them -- please -- "Did you have fun?" Am I against fun? No! But I'm not going to reduce my youth pastors down to making every week the funnest event of that child's life. Might you ask them, "Was there somebody tonight that you reached out to? Made feel like a friend? What did God teach you? What struck you from the lesson tonight? What did God do? How did tonight fit into what God's doing in your life?" I know I prayed -- this has been kind of a long week for me, and I

prayed, "God, may tonight's worship touch my heart in a unique way." When Scott was leading that last song, I thought, "Oh, Lord. You so answered my prayer." How did worship touch your heart tonight? You see, that's how we can partner with our church and with our youth and with our children's ministry, because when we go home, that's the time that we can keep things going, and we can drive it home, and we can learn from them -- "What incredible perspective did you get about God today? What did you learn? Tell me -- I'm all ears."

That's his prayer. Tell them and teach them. Why? Because every new generation is a generation at risk. So that the next generation would know them. Even the children yet to be born. I think it's common today for us to think that, "Wow, today's the hardest generation ever." I think it's hard. I just don't think it's the hardest ever. I think every generation -- the next generation is a generation at risk. Meaning -- if those of us who are older fail in our job, the next generation is at risk. If our generation fails to sign up to be missionaries, then the next generation is at risk. I think some of the stuff we're seeing in our country is because those of us who are older failed to understand we are missionaries to the next generation. We felt good that, you know what? I held on to my faith, but we don't understand, the text tells us, that we are to teach the children so that the next generation would know, so that the next generation would be faithful. Every generation is a generation at risk.

Barna tells us, and everybody else tells us, that about 85 percent of people who trust Christ, who place their faith in Christ, do so before the age of 18. That doesn't mean we give up on people over 18. It doesn't! It just means that if we're gonna be a strategic church, that we're probably gonna look at this and say, "You know what? Some of our greatest efforts need to be from zero to 18." That doesn't mean we don't like people my age. It means that people my age are missionaries to the next generation. Because -- that's the tender ages, that's the open ages that they come to Christ. If you were to look at our budget, I think it reflects that. We have children's ministries, we have a youth pastor, we have a senior high pastor, we have a collegiate pastor. You say, "Wait a minute. We only have one guy that visits the hospital?" Well -- Jim is supernatural. A lesser man we'd need five of 'em. But the reality is, no -- it is strategically laid out that we are investing heavily in the next generation. Why? Because I believe it's a biblical mandate. And I believe it's biblically strategic. And part of the reason why, like you, I'm here is because the small church that I grew up in invested in me. The church I grew up in -- probably 20 percent the size of this church. Wasn't huge. But during VBS, I'll never forget when Terry, a missionary to Peru, came and taught us how to build airplanes. I thought that was the coolest thing I'd ever done in my life. We were sending these balsa airplanes all over the place. But more than that, I remember a man who took an entire week and invested his life in me. I'll never forget that. I'll never forget how I was taught how to worship. We had this little crazy youth choir -- we traveled all over the place, and we led people in worship. And I thought, "This is the coolest thing in the world. A bunch of, you know, 17- and 18-year-olds that can't get their acts together actually get to lead the church in worship." It was amazing to me that they would let me do that.

My pastor believed in me before I did. He challenged me to play the guitar. He bought me a guitar on Monday. He said, "Here, Mark -- you sing a lot. We need somebody to lead worship in a couple of our services and for our college group." He bought me the guitar, and he goes,

"Uh -- how fast can you learn?" I said, "I don't know. I've never played the guitar." It was on a Monday. He said, "Good. You're leading worship on Friday." And I did. Because he invested in me.

There was a brother in our church who was a morning person. I didn't necessarily like mornings - but he wanted to teach me how to pray. And I, like the disciples, felt that the key to life was learning how to pray. And he goes, "I'll teach you how to pray." And I said, "Really? When do we get together?" And he goes, "Tomorrow morning. 5:30." "5:30?" "Yes, I'll call you every morning." "You're gonna call me at 5:30?" "Yes. And by the way, I'm probably not gonna teach you too much how to pray. We're just gonna pray." And every morning at 5:30. Now, friends -- some of those mornings I fell asleep. On him. And he didn't quit. He hung up, and he called me the next day at 5:30. And we prayed together for years. He wasn't a professional. He was a math teacher. He just happened to love younger men, especially fatherless ones.

My pastor would grab me. He goes, "Mark, I'm gonna go, and I'm gonna be preaching at this evangelistic thing, and I need a worship leader. And -- can you go?" And I -- "Well, yeah, I think I can. When are we going?" "Oh, in about an hour." "Great!" He drug me all over the northwest, because he believed in me. I began to think about our church. I realized that four of our current staff members grew up in this church. Discipled. And embarrassingly, some of you have told them, "I changed your diapers." I might wanna suggest -- go ahead and drop that one. But I don't know about you, but I think it's really, really amazing and a cool thing that four of your staff grew up here. Were discipled here. Met Jesus here. Learned how to lead here. You see, that's God's vision for the church. The day you have a child is the day you become a missionary. And the day we start a nursery is the day we as a church become a missionary. Because raising up the next generation of Christians is a burden we all must carry -- gladly. That's the Word of God.

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