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Tell Them the Story

By Rick Ligin

The Psalmist makes it clear that our God wants His people, including future generations, to "*put their confidence in Him; He wants to make sure that they do not forget (His) works,*" and that they "*keep His commandments*" (Psalm 78:7). To this end, He has commanded fathers to teach His testimonies and laws to their children, so that "*the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children,*" so that they also may "*put their confidence in God*" (78:1-7). Our God clearly wants His deeds to be remembered, so that even future generations will choose to serve Him.

With this Biblical backdrop in mind, it is interesting to note that our God, especially in the Old Testament, has a fondness for signs, symbols, and memorials. Evidently, our God is very much aware of man's tendency to forget; that we need reminders to help us remember. And so, quite often in dealing with His people, God gave Israel memorials to remind them of significant events. For example, He gave Israel the Passover, a feast which would remind them of how God passed over them, when He sent the destroyer to kill all the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-13). And in connection with the Passover, God also gave Israel the seven day "*Feast of Unleavened Bread*" (12:14-20), as a "*memorial*" of how He brought them out of the land of Egypt.

We see the same kind of thing happening, when Israel crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Joshua 4:1-24): on this occasion, as the Levitical priests carried the ark of the covenant into the river, God cut off the waters of the Jordan, so that the Israelites could cross on dry land. As they crossed, one representative from each of the twelve tribes was to pick up a stone from out of the riverbed and carry it to the other side. And then, when all of Israel had safely crossed, the twelve stones were to be piled up at Gilgal in the Promise Land as a "*sign*" and "*memorial*" (4:6-7) of this awesome event.

And then, after some initial victories in Canaan, Joshua moved the Israelites to Shechem, so that a command given by God through Moses could be carried out (Joshua 8:30-35; cf. Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68). Here, Joshua stationed six of the twelve tribes on Mount Gerizim, while placing the remaining six tribes across the valley on Mount Ebal. He then read aloud the "*blessings*" (represented by Mount Gerizim) that would come to Israel if they obeyed God's covenant; and the "*curses*" (represented by Mount Ebal) that would come on Israel if they disobeyed. All of the words of both the blessings and curses were read "*before all the assembly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers living among them*" (8:35).

Every time an Israelite family began cleaning out all the leaven in their household or sat down to eat the Passover and celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, they would be reminded of how God powerfully brought them out of Egyptian bondage. And every time an Israelite family passed that pile of stones at Gilgal, they would be reminded of how God miraculously cut off the waters of the Jordan, so that they could cross on dry land. And every time an Israelite family passed through Shechem between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, they would have a visual reminder of the blessings and curses attached to God's law.

But right here I want us to notice something important about these great memorials God set up for

His people: in all these cases, God anticipated that Israelite children would ask about these memorials? At Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, they would want to know, "*What is this?*" (Exodus 13:14) and "*What does this rite mean to you?*" (12:26). And when they passed the stones at Gilgal, God expected that the children would ask their fathers, "*What are these stones?*" (Joshua 4:21). And in all these cases, God tells fathers how they are to respond: He essentially says to fathers, "You tell them what really happened! Tell your children the story of what I did!" (cf. Exodus 12:27; 13:14-16; Joshua 4:21-24).

Now, I believe that there is a powerful lesson in this for us as parents, and especially as fathers. You see, we are not without memorials under the new covenant. We have, at least, one great memorial in the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. As Paul recounts what he had received from the Lord regarding this Supper, he reminds us that Jesus had said, "*Do this in remembrance of Me*" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). Paul even went on to say that as we "*eat this bread and drink the cup,*" we "*proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*" (11:26). Every time we gather to eat this sacred meal, we are reminded of the most significant event in human history! We are reminded of how much our God loves us: that He loves us so much that He actually sent His only Son to die on a cruel Roman cross to redeem us from our sins! And not only did He die, but He also miraculously rose from the dead to prove that He is, indeed, the Son of God and that His death on the cross was for our salvation. Our eating this Lord's Supper reminds us of these real events that actually happened in time and space in order for us to be saved from our sins!

And what do you think we, as parents, ought to say when our children ask us about why we eat the Lord's Supper every first day of the week? If your children haven't yet asked you about this, they probably will? So, what should you say? Maybe you will be tempted to simply say, "Well, that's just a part of our religion...part of our worship"; or, "We do it, because it's one of the five acts (?) of worship." I would suggest that there is a far better answer. When our children ask us, "Why do you eat the Lord's Supper?" we ought to respond in the same kind of way that God told Israelite parents to respond. We must tell them the story! We must give them the historical account of what actually happened, and help them see the reality and significance of this historic event! When our children are helped to see that our faith in God is rooted in actual events of history...powerful works that our God actually performed in time and space, it will go a long way in helping them to eventually choose to put their own confidence in God, and to serve Him with their lives.

We serve a real God, who is powerfully active in human history! And that God wants us and our children and our children's children to remember Him and His powerful works, so that we will put our confidence in Him. That can only happen, if we as parents are telling our children of all the wonderful things that He has done! When your children ask, tell them the story!

And while we're at it, let me add this postscript: God anticipates that our children will ask us a lot of questions about how and why we serve Him. In the Old Testament, Israel was told that "*these words*" of God were to be on their hearts, and that they were to "*teach them diligently*" to their children every day (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). And when their children asked them about these words...when they asked, "*What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the LORD our God commanded you?*" (6:20), parents were told to respond by telling their children about why God had given them these commandments, and how His giving them this law was rooted in their history with Him (6:20-25). And in the same way, when our children ask us anything that is somehow related to our serving God, we need to give them the moral reason rooted in God's historical word! If they want to know, "Why do we have to do this" or "why can't we do that?", don't just tell them, "because that's our religious tradition" or "because that's what our religion teaches." Instead, give them the moral reason rooted in God's Word! When our

children come to see that our powerful God, who is active in human history, instructs us to walk in His way for our own good, they will come to appreciate Him more and put their confidence in Him. And that's what God wants (Psalm 78:1-7)!

Psalm 78:1-7 A Maskil of Asaph. *“Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. (2) I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, (3) Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. (4) We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. (5) For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children, (6) That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, (7) That they should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments:”*
