

Psalm 78 v 1 - 11

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Preacher: Robin Singleton

[0 : 01] Good evening. Let's begin our worship as I read a few words from the beginning of Psalm 145. Psalm 145, it begins like this, a Psalm of David.

I will exalt you, my God the King. I will praise your name forever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name forever and ever.

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. His greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another. They will tell of your mighty acts.

They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works and I will proclaim your great deeds.

They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. I hope you feel the same this evening as you come.

[1 : 05] No matter what might be going on in your life, no matter what troubles or trials you might be facing, there's always something to be thankful for when we turn our eyes to God.

So we're going to stand and sing together. It's hymn number 137. To God be the glory, great things he has done. And let's come before our Heavenly Father in prayer.

Truly, our Father, we do thank you for just being able to stop for a moment and to sing these songs and to remember and to think through the great things that you have done.

Lord, that wherever we look on this planet, indeed, whenever we look into the skies and see the far reaches of the universe, we see the marks of your handiwork.

That Lord, you're a God who created all things. The beauty of a flower. As we look out to sea and see the waves crashing one, two and fro.

[2 : 21] Lord, we see all this as your handiwork. We look at ourselves and see, again, your great design. We look back over the centuries of history of mankind and we see the marvellous way in which you have been working out your plan of salvation.

We thank you, our Heavenly Father, for the way that you've reached into our lost world, the world that's rebelled and gone its own way. Indeed, we count ourselves in upon that, that we are rebels at heart, that we're sinners.

We don't come this evening thinking that we're anything special, any better than anybody else. But that, Lord, you reached out into this fallen world and gave us your Son, the most precious thing that you could give us.

And we thank you that as he died on the cross, willingly, giving his life, he was doing it for us. That his blood was shed to cover our sin. That we might be forgiven.

That we might be able to enter into the presence of the living God. And what a joy it is tonight to think of these things and to come and know that we're in your presence. To know that you're the God of the universe, yet you also care about us.

[3 : 40] In fact, you invite us to come and worship. And so, Lord God, we come just as we are. We can't pretend, we can't hide anything from you. We come just as we are.

But we come asking your forgiveness for our sin. In thought and word and deed. We come asking, Lord, if there are things that we are not even aware that we've done, that have offended you.

We pray that you would bring it to our minds. That we might seek your forgiveness. We come, not trusting in ourselves, but trusting in the Lord Jesus.

We come reminding ourselves of that great work of salvation. We thank you, Lord, that you have been a God that's not only done something in history, but you've been with your people throughout history.

And as we look back through the New Testament, and indeed the history of the church since then, Lord, we thank you that your hand has been at work in the lives of your people. We thank you, Lord, that we have much to be thankful for as we look back at our own lives.

[4 : 45] And consider what you have done for us. The way that you've intervened. The way you've protected. The way you've helped us through difficulties and troubles. And, Lord, tonight we come.

Perhaps we come with heavy hearts. We pray, Lord, you'd meet us exactly where we are. That you'd speak into our lives. That you'd lift our eyes towards you.

And that we might bring you the glory and praise that you deserve. And, Lord, if we've come tonight and we're on a bit of a wayward track, there's stuff going on in our lives which you're not happy with, we pray that you would bring us to our knees before you, the holy God.

And that, Lord, we would know the true, complete forgiveness of God. And that you would send us on our way to be your servants here in this world. So, Lord, please meet with us.

We pray tonight. Come close. Speak into our lives. Give us an expectancy. Give us ears to hear your voice. Give us soft hearts to receive what you have to say.

[5 : 49] For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. I hope that you come tonight wanting to praise God. I guess you do.

I guess that's why you're here. We're going to sing next. Come people of the risen King who delight to sing his praise. Now, I'm guessing my head's going to be in the way here, isn't it?

So, I think I'll come down the bottom. Let's stand and sing. I'm going to have a couple of short Bible readings.

Not specifically the passage that I'm going to be preaching on, but related to it. The first one is from Matthew chapter 19. Matthew chapter 19 and verse 13.

Matthew 19, 13. It's entitled in the NIV, The Little Children and Jesus. Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.

[7 : 05] But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there. We're also going to ask if you turn to Ephesians chapter 6.

It's a bit of a danger zone, Ephesians, in my book.

In my Bible, it's been well-worn, Ephesians, but this bit's still readable. So, I'm pleased to read chapter 6 and verses 1 to 4.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life on the earth.

[8 : 10] Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. That's God's word and we pray that he would continue to speak to us through his word this evening.

Psalm 78. Psalm 78. Just the first 11 verses. Psalm 78.

Oh, my people, hear my teaching. Listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter hidden things, things from of old.

What we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us, we will not hide from their children. We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power and the wonders that he has done.

He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so that the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born.

[9 : 44] And they, in turn, would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds, but would keep his commands. They would not be like their forefathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.

The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle. They did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law.

They forgot what he had done, the wonders that he had shown them. Again, we pray that God will speak to us through his word. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Father, as we come to this passage and we come to this topic, thinking of children, Lord, just so conscious that there are hurts and there's pain and there's challenges, broken hearts, perhaps.

And Lord, I just pray that you would minister to us through your grace, that we would hear what it is that you would want to say to us. Lord, save us, we ask, from unnecessary guilt or shame.

[11 : 13] But Lord, please, speak into our lives about how we should be living today, the things that we could be thinking, the things that we should be praying, the things that we should be doing as we seek the salvation of these young ones.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're going to be thinking about Psalm 78. But I just want to mention a few verses from Psalm 127.

Verse 3 says this, Sons are a heritage from the Lord. Children are a reward from him. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are sons born in one's youth.

Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate. I just want to just pick up briefly this idea of children being like arrows in the hand of a warrior.

And one thing that arrows need is direction. Arrows need to be aimed. And so if you're, tonight, you're a parent and you've got dependent children, then you should have a vision for their lives.

[12 : 32] You have a direction, a trajectory upon which you want to send them. Perhaps tonight you're a parent of older children, children that have left home, independent children.

And surely we should have a vision. It might be worked out in a slightly different way and because they're older, things are slightly different. But still, we should have a vision for our children, a thing that we would be praying for and longing for.

And perhaps, as we get opportunity, guiding them in a particular direction. Perhaps tonight you're single or you're married without children or you're a grandparent or some other group of persons who's not directly got children to look after.

Equally, you too should have a vision for the children upon which you have an influence. There are children in the church where you meet. There are children, no doubt, in your wider family. And so too we should have this desire to send children in a particular direction.

And I guess there's one little group I've not mentioned and that's the children that are here tonight. It's lovely to see children gathering with us. Now, what I want you to know tonight is what we as adults, what our vision is for you.

[13 : 55] What we long for in your lives. There's lots of things, I guess, that could be said about children from the Bible. But perhaps this is the most fundamental question.

What is it that we're aiming for as we seek to raise children in this world? And just before we dive into Psalm 78, let me just explain why we're doing this tonight.

Firstly, it's a message on my own heart. Oh, sorry. It's a message on my own heart. I have to do a heart down here, otherwise it squeaks. Yeah, a message on my own heart.

Something that I really feel God's spoken to me about. But I really do feel it's a message for today. A message for our generations. A message for us to hear.

It's proactively something to hear for those who are responsible for young children. And perhaps reactively, I must admit that one of the things that really moved me when I first went to the church at Maske and I went round visiting folk, just getting to know the people that came to the church, one after another of stories of children that had left home and also seemed to have left God behind.

[15 : 20] Children that have been brought up in the faith in a Christian home and just hearing one broken parent after another talk to me about their prodigal children. And I just want to say to you tonight, if that's you or if there's any kind of pain associated with me talking about children, please don't feel that this is any kind of personal criticism.

I don't want to give the devil a foothold into your life for inappropriate guilt or to take away God's sovereignty in salvation. I believe that God is sovereign in salvation. But I do want to say, is there anything that we can learn?

Is there anything that we should pay attention to from the Bible and from the situations in which we find ourselves that would help us today with the children that are in our care and the things that we should be doing?

And Psalm 78 is written in the context of the failure and the repeated rebellion of the people of Israel. And it highlights the eternal grace and mercy of God.

I want you to hear that message of hope amongst perhaps some of the pain that might be involved in me speaking about these things. I also want to cover this because I want you to think biblically about your role as a parent or as family or friends and indeed in the church as we seek to evangelise and disciple and teach children.

[16 : 49] So what exactly is our aim in regards to raising or helping to raise children? One wag said, if you aim at nothing then you're sure to hit it.

Let's see what the Bible says. In the middle of the repeated unfaithfulness of Israel, Asaph the psalmist says that the first aim is this, that they would know about God.

Do you remember that verse? It's one of the saddest verses in the Bible to me. It's in Judges chapter 2 and verse 10 and it says, After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.

What a sad situation to be in. That a whole generation would grow up not knowing the Lord nor even what he had done for Israel. Let's remind ourselves of these verses 4 to 6.

We will not hide them from their children. We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.

[18 : 11] He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children so that the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

We will not hide the truth from our children. There's the first thing. We will tell them the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.

We will tell them of God's power. We will tell them of the wonders that he has done. We will follow the commands of God by telling them about the commandments of God, the statutes of God.

And we will do this so that the next generation knows about God. So that they will tell the generation who are not yet born and so that they in turn will tell their children.

Now undoubtedly, God deals with each generation as it comes forth. But we don't expect God to repeat his ancient works like some awful television repeat, you know, from ancient years ago.

[19 : 21] We don't expect to see the ten plagues being repeated. We don't expect to see the escape through the Red Sea to be repeated. We don't expect to see the ten commandments being repeated.

The victory over Jericho, etc, etc. We don't expect to see Jesus crucified again. God has called us to pass these historical events, these facts, to our children.

We're being called to teach them the Bible, to tell them the Bible, to memorize the Bible. We want them to know about God and what He has done.

We want them to be saturated with the Bible. One guy I heard talking about this, he came in and he had a great big bucket and he put his sponge in the bucket and he lifted it up and he said, when trouble comes to our children and he gave it a little poke, he said, Bible's going to come out.

When there's difficulties in life or decisions to make and he twisted it and more water came out, the Bible is what's going to come out because they're saturated with the Bible.

[20 : 28] We want them to ooze Bible when they're squeezed, when they're pricked, when they're praying, when they're talking, when they're going about their lives. We want the Bible to be oozing out of their lives because they've been filled with God's Word.

There's much else for children to learn but the Bible's got to be a top priority. My main point really is this is the aim that we have, that they would know about God.

But we could just briefly consider some of the ways in which we could do this and I want to remind you that primarily it does not seem that this happens through the church.

It does happen through the church but the responsibility for it is given to parents. And so if you look to Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 4 which we read earlier you'll find that specifically it mentions the father.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. And I just want to remind fathers that is a responsibility that we hold.

[21 : 44] undoubtedly to be shared with our wives but we have a responsibility as fathers to bring up our children in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Lord. Or you might want to look back to Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 7. Or verse 6, let's start in verse 6.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. Find opportunities all the time, everywhere, to be speaking to children about the Lord Jesus.

To be speaking to them about God's wisdom. To speak to them about righteousness and wickedness and wisdom and foolishness. Take every opportunity, whether you're sitting down or going out, you're sitting at a meal, to speak to them about the things of God.

[23 : 04] You might find that having a time of family worship might help you. You might find that there's some wonderful children's Bible study notes being produced now that children themselves can do daily as they learn the scriptures.

Spend time together. Bring them along with you to church. Some of the ways in which we can nurture and encourage our children in the things of God.

But let's just for now agree that that's our aim. Part of our vision for children and the children that we love and know is that they learn the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, the His power and the wonders that He has done.

We want children to look at the world through glasses that are like a biblical worldview. That they would look at the world with something of God's eyes as they see the challenges before them in life.

We want them to know what's good TV and what's bad TV because they know the Bible. We want them to know what God is like because they know the Bible. We want them to know when something is wrong because they know the Bible.

[24 : 26] Even when their friends are doing it and everybody's doing it they know it's wrong because they know the Bible. We equip our children for the most important things in life by teaching them the Bible.

They understand and learn about education, they learn about work, they learn about singleness, they learn about marriage, they'll learn about alcohol, they'll learn about sexual relationships, they'll learn about friendships, they'll learn about suffering and any other subject that you'd like to mention they'll learn it best from the Bible and through loving family helping them to learn.

And yes, just briefly and I promise that this isn't going to be an opportunity for an advert but this is why my wife and I teach our children at home.

I'm not someone that would go around telling everyone else that they need to do this but that is a reason why we feel I don't know of a school that puts the Bible at the centre of their curriculum. There are some but I don't know of any locally.

You remember Proverbs 1, 7? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Spurgeon says the best education is education in the best things.

[25 : 42] My longing and I'm sure that yours too is that our children would outstrip us in this. That they would know the Bible better than us. That they would know God better than us.

That they would pursue God wholeheartedly in a way that perhaps we never have. That they would know the Bible at an early age and they would know more fully the nature of God through that knowledge of the Bible.

This is just one part of our reign but we will not hide these things from our children. What a strange way of saying it. We will not hide these things from children. What ways in which how could we hide these things from our children?

Well we could hide them couldn't we through neglect? Not taking the responsibility to do this. Feeling that that's someone else's responsibility. Or the Sunday school teacher will teach them this.

Or the youth club will teach them this. Or so and so will teach them this. Well we need to take responsibility don't we as parents that we want to teach them. As well as those other things. We don't want to hide them through our laziness.

[26 : 49] We don't want to hide these truths from our children through our own ignorance. And so perhaps we need to do some study so that we can teach our own children. That we can make it a real passion that they would learn the Bible.

So that's our first aim. That they would know about God. But let's not stop there. The second aim that we that they would put their trust in God.

Knowing about God is of course just the path by which through God's grace our children will come to the meeting place wherein they're able to actually know God.

Our text books it like this verse 7 Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commandments. Think of a child right now.

Perhaps your own child or perhaps a child that you know someone that you could just pray for even while we're here just pray for a child that you would see in them salvation that you would see them coming to the Lord Jesus and trusting in him.

[28 : 04] Pray for them that they would put their trust in God. Pray perhaps for someone that you know hears the Bible knows the Bible but yet at the moment as far as you know haven't put their trust in God.

Pray for them right now. What a great step this is for them to take. A child moves from knowing about God to knowing God. Of course as we know from Ephesians 2 it's by grace that they're saved but through faith.

What a joy what a thrill to see our children however old coming from death to life moving from darkness to light moving from Satan's kingdom to the kingdom of God.

This is our vision for our children to experience the delights of trusting in the living God to be born again and let's remember what this means let's put it in concrete terms it means that the child is now born again in God's eternal kingdom in a world that's marching towards hell they've been snatched from the flames and are now safe in Christ bound for heaven a child with an eternal inheritance that they have believed what Jesus has done for them and are now following him the self is off the throne we can see the problem can't we in children's lives of self being on the throne and let's be honest we don't need to look at children do we we see it in our own hearts of self being on the throne but that transformation when someone sees and understands the gospel and the self is taken off the throne of their life and Jesus takes the place they couldn't be any more different from their peers they become a new creation again much more could be said about this in practical terms but one of the things and one of the questions

I want to ask of myself and I want to ask of you is does your interaction with children do your prayers for children the things that you do and say around them does it really demonstrate this vision that you believe the greatest thing that could happen to these children is that they could come to know Christ and to follow him do you see in their lives eternity in the balance do you yearn for their salvation do you show it in your priorities in the things that you do there's a story in one of the books I read a while back about this I don't know if you've heard of him a guy called Voddy Balcom family driven faith I think the book is called and he gives an example of a dad it's an American book and he's investing loads of time and energy in helping his son to become a pro baseball player he's always out of the practices he's always taking long distance journeys to take him to the match he's doing everything he can to see his lad reach the highest echelons of this sporting arena but spiritually there was so little contact between them so little investment of energy of the father and Voddy says it didn't shock me at all when the dad came to him and said why is it my son at 17 or whatever has walked away we need to learn don't we those verses

[31 : 49] Jesus said what good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul and we need to live that out around the children that are around us are we concerned about their health of course we are are we concerned about the GCSE results of course we are are we concerned about their sporting achievements of course are we concerned about their career and their friendships their marriage partner their home their finances of course we're concerned about all those things but our greatest concern is spiritual and not physical and I wonder if we show that to them and set an example in our own lives that that's the greatest thing for us and that's the thing that we want to be at the centre of their lives our children need to know that there is absolutely nothing more important to us regarding them than their salvation and undoubtedly salvation is in

God's sovereign hands but that we will do everything within our ability to see our vision fulfilled in their lives we won't be satisfied with good school reports though that would be nice we won't be satisfied with good grades we won't be satisfied when we see them on a good career or with a good wife or husband or living in a nice home or having a good family what we desire what we long for what we pray for what we yearn what we cry for is that they must be saved pray for them even now pray however young or old this child is pray for them that they might be saved there's the first two aims I've got two more but they're much shorter the third aim a bit of an aside really that they would be worshippers of God it's not an aside because it's not important but in the context of what I'm saying the worshippers of God don't miss the other reason for knowing about

God was his praiseworthy deeds page 17 Psalm 78 and verse 4 we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord we want to stir our children to praise God to be worshippers of God and of course if you're a follower of the catechisms and all such things you'll know what's the chief end of man to glorify God and enjoy him forever what a thrill it is or it will be to see your children or the children around you praising and worshipping God so we pray our vision is that they would know about God that they would put their trust in God that they would be worshippers of God and finally that they would be obedient to God

God verse 7 then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands we're aiming for salvation which comes from a knowledge of the truth but that's not the end we long that our children would bring God glory through their obedience to him our prayer and our longing our aim our vision for our children is that they wouldn't just stop at trusting but they will become obedient followers of the Lord Jesus we're not aiming for a half hearted apathy we're not aiming for children who walk as close to the edge of acceptable as they can which I guess we can all be a bit prone to seeing what we can get away with and feel like we can still be in the kingdom of

God and balance on the edge we don't aim for children who are only obedient to God when they're being watched by us or by somebody else what we long to see is heart obedience and there's a far cry isn't there a difference between that and the sort of religious when someone is just going along doing what they know their parents are expecting them to do they're keeping a smile on their parents face but really there's no heart obedience what a longing we have that it will be real and deep and that there will be a heart obedience a heart that's been transformed by the renewing spirit of God a heart that's pliable a heart that's soft a heart that's humble a heart that's ready to listen to God and ready to accept advice and counsel of wise Christians we long to see the work of God in their lives being proved by the fruit of the spirit being evident and by the gifts of the spirit being given to them by their desire to be holy and by their longing to tell others about the

[37 : 18] Lord Jesus and eventually our vision doesn't stop does it our vision says and beyond that perhaps as they have children or they have influence over other children they would also be seeking the same thing in those children's lives what a vision to have I don't doubt that we all agree but would we pray for it would we work for it would we yearn for it in our own families in the activities of the church no doubt you have contact with lots of children through the ministries of the church wider afield children that have no impact at the moment from the gospel is this what we're yearning for and longing for that the next generation would not only know the works of the

Lord but would trust in him would worship him and would be obedient to him let's pray father father father god we thank you that you care about children we thank you for the way the lord jesus welcome children we thank you for the way he used them as an example their complete trust and faith and lord we pray for the children in our own families that you would do a mighty work in their lives and we acknowledge that we have a responsibility whether we're fathers or mothers or whether we're just people that occasionally see children we all have a responsibility to be those that are pointing these children all of us pointing them in the same direction wanting them to know about

God wanting them to put their trust in God wanting them to worship God wanting them to be obedient to God and we pray that our lives would not become an obstacle in these children's lives that they wouldn't look at us and see that there's a contradiction but would see in us what we're saying which is jesus is he is the most precious thing in our life and we want him to be the most precious thing in their lives too so lord would you hear our hearts cry you know the people here you know the children that have been in their minds as I've been speaking you know the ones that they're thankful for and encouraged about those children that are going on with God and they we're so thankful lord for what you have done in their lives but lord there's also children who lord are really on our hearts children that need to hear the gospel children that need to be brought back from wayward ways children that need to be stopped in their sin shown that they're rebellion and brought into the wonderful kingdom of Christ our lord we pray that you would do it you would do it in our midst for your glory in Jesus name amen amen