

Leave a Lasting Legacy for the Lord's Lambs!

A sermon based on Psalm 78:1-7

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

When you leave this life, how do you want to be remembered? I know, it's not a topic most feel comfortable talking about, their own death, but it's inevitable. Unless Jesus comes first, you too will fall prey. So, again, when you go, think about it, how do you want to be remembered?

Throughout the years, one way people have built a lasting memory is with their gravestones. I don't know if you've ever gone to a cemetery and looked at gravestones. Most of the time, they're fairly basic – the name, the date of birth, the date of death, maybe an RIP or a blank spot for the spouse, whenever they go. But I ran across a few which were a bit telling about the people lying in the ground by them.

Famous comedian Rodney Dangerfield's headstone reads, "Well, there goes the neighborhood," leaving a little bit of his humor in his wake. Geoffrey Spencer's lasting memory will be the way he died. Inscribed on his grave: "Lost life by stab in falling on ink eraser, evading 6 young women trying to give him birthday kisses in office metropolitan life building." Robert Clay Allison would have you know "he never killed a man that did not need killing." The gravestone of an atheist simply reads, "Here lies an atheist. All dressed up and no place to go." And finally, Martin Luther King, Jr., in case anyone forgets who he is, his gravestone says, "Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, I'm Free at Last."

Leaves a snapshot of who those particular people were...a snapshot encapsulating them, doesn't it? Again, what do you want others to remember about you? You know, last week we talked about God's final word to us, but today, we're talking about our final word, what we want others to remember about us...or one step further, to what's most important, what we are going to leave behind. On this Christian Education Sunday, I hope and pray for all of you, it's nothing more than this...that you and I leave a lasting legacy for the Lord's lambs. Listen to that again. Leave a lasting legacy for the Lord's lambs.

Friends, today, we're talking about legacy building. I'm sure it's not a new concept to you. Most of you are probably already doing that, whether you're aware of it or not. Every personal interaction, every email, every tweet, like or post adds to your body of work which will reverberate generationally through friends, family, co-workers and associates. Right now, you're building how you will be remembered when you're gone.

And, right now, you're building what you want to leave behind when you're gone. Again, a lot of you are likely already doing that. If you're married, have children, or even just have loved ones in your life, you're in the same boat as so many others who want to make sure their loved ones are cared for physically after they die. And a lot of that has to do with your legacy...with estate planning, wills, power of attorney, medical directives. Is that important to you? I doubt anyone would say no. Doing that, making those plans, it sends loved ones the message, "I love you. I care about you."

Friends, I want to challenge you this morning with a question...what kind of legacy are you building spiritually? Put the money aside, the worldly wealth aside, and let's talk about spiritual health...yours and that of the Lord's lambs.

Listen to some of the words from Psalm 78, ***“O 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 them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, 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.”***

Are you living a life where God’s Word (and hearing it, learning it, taking it to heart) is of utmost importance to you? And is that the legacy you are preparing to pass along to the next generation, to your loved ones, to the Lord’s lambs?

One of the major complaints (and I guess you could say problems) churches are facing today is how we are continually losing connections with teenagers around high school/college age, right when they’re finally getting and exploring this new freedom...kids who are deciding they don’t want church. We here have not been immune to that.

And we could wrack our minds trying to pinpoint what the exact cause of that is, or maybe, we could just look at the legacy we’re slowly passing on. Again, how important is having God’s Word in your daily life...how important is that legacy, that heritage to you? How would you rate the legacy you’re passing along?

You know, I’ll admit, when I finished seminary, I was so glad. Not just because I finally had a call and could start ministry work...but also because I was done. Done with classes...done with learning. I thought I knew enough. Hasn’t taken too long to realize how much I still don’t know, how much more learning from God’s Word I still need.

Is that your approach towards God’s Word? I made it through catechism and confirmation; now Bible Class is useless...redundant because I already know everything I need to know. I read through my Bible once, no more reading is necessary; I won’t find anything new. I put in my time, used to go to Bible class, but wasn’t really getting anything out of it anymore, so I stopped going. Sure, I may not be able to recollect everything I’ve learned, everything the Bible teaches, but is that such a big deal? Church is Bible hour for me...and that’s enough.

How do any of those thoughts match up with Paul’s words in Colossians, ***“Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly”***? If that’s been your attitude towards further reading and study of God’s Word...if that’s been your attitude towards the thoughts of growing in your faith in Jesus, which as God’s Word will tell you, comes only through exposure to God’s Word, the only conclusion we reach the legacy we’re preparing to pass along is less than satisfying but that circles around to us and how well we’ve done with our own spiritual health. Right, we can’t expect the next generation to respect and love God’s Word and read and learn and know that Word if we don’t have the respect and love ourselves...if we don’t know that Word ourselves.

Martin Luther’s Small Catechism...do you know why he wrote it? In his *Preface*, he talks about the ***“deplorable, wretched deprivation that I recently encountered while I was a visitor...the ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith.”***

Maybe we're not that bad...we know a little more than "absolutely nothing." But are you satisfied with that...with "just enough" for yourself? Is that the legacy you want to pass along?

"We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord...so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, 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."

Read the rest of Psalm 78 and walk through Israel's early history, how so often God did so much for his children, and just as often, they forgot. Generations to come forgot about God's grace and love and rebelled against him because generations before did the exact same thing. Is that the legacy you're working towards?

If you've forgotten the reasons to be in God's Word, the reasons to want to be in his Word....if you've forgotten the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, then let's start remembering now.

The book of Ephesians lays it out rather nicely, ***"For [God] chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons (and daughters) through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."***

Do you remember? Luther once wrote, ***"It is beyond a doubt that the entire Scripture points to Christ alone."*** It's true. God's Word tells us how in his love and grace, God chose us poor, miserable, wretched sinners...he chose us, or predestined us, to be holy and blameless...to be his adopted children. And then in time, ***"while we were still sinners (as God's Word tells us), Christ died for us."*** He redeemed us with his blood, shed on the cross as he bore our sins there. That's Jesus' legacy – salvation, forgiveness for you and me through his life, death, and resurrection. And God has made this good news known to us through his Word. And he reveals so much more about himself and what he wants us to do, how he wants us to respond to his praiseworthy deeds here in his Word.

If you were to learn nothing else today, I hope you would learn that God is serious about his Word, and that he and his Word should ever be the center and the focus of our entire life. His Word is worthy of our time, worthy of paying attention with the whole heart, and worthy of have our minds and souls ever be occupied with that Word, the good news of Jesus, and will of God.

That's the legacy God wants you to build now. That's the legacy the Lord wants you to leave for his lambs. And it's the only legacy worth leaving.

So, how can you build your legacy? Perhaps the philosopher Socrates has some sage advice here, "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." Take that approach. Read Scripture with an open mind, expecting to learn something new.

They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but I don't think "they" have ever met Finley, our 5 year-old Golden Retriever "puppy" (although I'd contend he's getting old). With him, with food (any food), he will learn. Friends, with the food of the Word, you can uncover new truths, be corrected in misinterpretations, find comfort in weakness, be encouraged in your faith in Jesus. Martin Luther wrote

about how the Bible is in a class by itself as he said, **“No book, teaching, or word is able to comfort in troubles, fear, misery, death, yea, in the midst of devils and in hell, except this book, which teaches us God’s Word and in which God himself speaks with us as a man speaks with his friends.”**

From the “words of [God’s] mouth,” the “parables,” the “things of old” our verses here talk about, there’s always something new and always something for you in Scripture. Eagerly strive to find it. After all, before you can tell the next generation, you have to know yourself.

And, as you’re building your legacy, how can you start passing it along? Listen to God’s encouragement from our first lesson, ***“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 doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”***

In a world where Satan tries to steal your focus or divert it in so many other directions, God steers your focus back to the only thing that truly matters, his Word. Look at how much he wants it to be a part of your daily life. First, make sure it’s on your heart. Impress it on your children, as you take them to Sunday School...as you show them the importance of Bible study and Bible reading for your life.. Talk about it when you’re at home, when you’re out and about, when you go to bed, when you get up...or, in other words, talk about God’s Word all the time. Put it on your doorframes or your gates, or simply put a Bible on the coffee table, a devotion book on the kitchen table, and don’t let it just sit there and gather dust. Tie it as symbols on your hands and bind it on your foreheads, which you could do literally (as a pastor once told me the Jews in Israel actually do), or you could have God’s Word coursing through your mind, meditating on it throughout the day.

As I mentioned earlier, every personal interaction, every email, every tweet, like or post adds to your body of work which will reverberate generationally through friends, family, co-workers and associates. The same is true when God’s Word enters the equation. Make God’s Word the one thing needed in your life, and watch as that love for his Word trickles down to the next generation.

And don’t just leave that up to the church, this teaching and educating on God’s Word. You notice what’s missing here in our verses? The church isn’t mentioned at all. While it’s here to help, all of God’s people are tasked with leaving this legacy with the Lord’s lambs.

Back to my original question, what kind of legacy do you want to leave behind? What snapshot do you want people to see? Practically speaking, there are tools out there to help you out...legacy planning tools which will help the future generations of your family by using things like retirement funds or life insurance to maximize the amount of money you pass on. That’s all fine and good, but it doesn’t last. A person could inherit hundreds of thousands of dollars one day and spend it all the next.

God’s got a legacy planning tool, too...his Word. That lasts. The Word of the Lord stands forever. That’s the kind of lasting legacy we want to have, people who love God, who love God’s Word, and are eager to have it as an essential part of their lives. And by the grace of God, that’s the lasting legacy we’ll leave for the next generation...for the Lord’s lambs. Amen.