

Psalm 78

by Henry Law

The sermon emphasizes the importance of listening to God's instruction, remembering His hand and His deliverance, and serving and obeying Him.

Scripture: Psalm 78:17

Topics: "Divine Mercy", "Faithfulness"

Description

Henry Law preaches about the importance of heeding God's words and the consequences of ingratitude and rebellion. The sermon emphasizes the need to pass down God's teachings to future generations, reflecting on Israel's history of disobedience despite God's repeated mercies. It warns against provoking God's anger through unbelief and idolatry, showcasing the cycle of sin, punishment, and temporary repentance seen in Israel's journey. Despite Israel's faithlessness, God's compassion and forgiveness are highlighted, along with the consequences of disobedience and the importance of seeking God's guidance and mercy.

Transcript

We are enjoined to give earnest heed to the words spoken from heaven. A dark display of Israel's ingratitude and rebellion follows. God's repeated and abundant mercies seem only to awaken evil. May the sad example be a profitable warning!

1-6. "Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old; which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength, and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children."

This introduction claims especial notice. We often crave audience of God. He here calls us to incline our ears to His instruction. Let us be quick to hear. His revelation is the truth of truths, the light of light, the joy of joys, wisdom in the highest. Not only should we read, and mark, and learn; we should impress these doctrines on our offspring. Fathers should teach their children; and children's children should in turn transmit.

7-11. "Those who might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God. The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in His law; and forgot His works, and His wonders that He had shown them."

Bible-study quickens grace. By pondering God's works of old, confidence will strengthen and hope become more bright. We shall tremble, also, at the dreadful iniquity of Israel's sons. They quenched the recollection of the repeated mercies, which blessed their fathers. Armor was provided for them, but they refused to stand firm, and fled before their foes. They closed their eyes, and would not see His arm extended for their help.

12-16. "He did marvelous things in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters to stand as a heap. In the daytime also He led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers."

A recapitulation follows of the wonders which cradled the childhood of His people. In this history, God's character--His love, His might--is written as with a sunbeam. No enemies could crush. No perils could destroy. Impossibilities vanished. He made the waters of the deep to be a highway for their feet. The mighty billows stood as a wall on their right hand and on their left. That their journey might be safe, a cloud from heaven preceded their march by day, and a canopy of fire shone over them at night. Does thirst oppress them? The hard rock opens its flinty sides, and refreshing streams flow in their rear. Miracle followed miracle, proclaiming His unceasing care.

17-25. "And they sinned yet more against Him by provoking the Most High in the wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking food for their lust. Yes, they spoke against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, He smote the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can He give bread also? can He provide flesh for His people? Therefore the Lord heard this, and was angry; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; because they believed not in God, and trusted not in His salvation, though He had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the bread of heaven. Man ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full."

Can it be that such miracles of love could fail to melt their hearts; and that such evidence of fatherly guardianship should allow rebellion still to live! Alas! abundant kindness awakened superabundant sin! They sneered at past lovingkindness. They allowed that their thirst had been relieved; but they doubted whether food could similarly be provided! Can we marvel that God's wrath went forth, and that fire raged in their camp? While we bless God for His goodness, let us remember that to hardened rebels He is a consuming fire.

26-29. "He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven; and by His power He brought in the south wind. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea. And He let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. So they ate, and were well filled; for He gave them their own desire; they were not estranged from their lust."

How striking is this instance of God's forbearance! Tender compassion checks the outbursts of just vengeance. Instead of punishing, He gratifies their impious desires. He sent the food which they believed He could not grant. He multiplied it beyond their power to gather. They fed until their appetite was more than sated.

30-32. "But while their food was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel. For all this they sinned still, and believed not for His wondrous works."

Let presumptuous rebels tremble. Wrath may linger, but delay is not forgiveness. In due time it will blaze forth, and terrible will be the results. The dreadful sequel shows this truth. While they feasted, vengeance fell. The richest and the mightiest found no refuge in their high estate. They perished with the lowest in the camp. But the hard hearts, unmelted by the plenty, and unappalled by wrath, grew more daring in rebellious feeling. They had no confidence in His goodness, no fear of His anger. Reprobate is the case which neither mercy nor sternness leads to submission.

33-37. "Therefore He consumed their days in vanity, and their years in trouble. When He slew them, then they sought Him; and they returned and enquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant."

Their troubles were continued. The scourge drove them to seek relief; but their outward change was not inward conversion. In semblance they became other men; but the same features were behind the mask. With utterance they seemingly drew near; but falsehood dwelt on their lips. They were not slow to promise; but their unstable minds were like the leaking sieve. They made a covenant; but it was only to break it.

38-41. "But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yes, many times He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath. For He remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passes away, and comes not again. How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel."

But still compassion is not utterly exhausted. Our God is infinite in all His attributes. He pitied them still, and held back the arm uplifted to destroy. He remembered their utter feebleness. For a little season only they sojourned on earth. We hear the wind, but it soon is gone. So from this scene they would be quickly taken, and their places would be no more found. To enumerate their sins exceeds all power. So, also, to enumerate God's acts of goodness. While we shudder at their vileness, let us adore forbearing mercy.

42-48. "They remembered not His hand, nor the day when He delivered them from the enemy. How He had worked His signs in Egypt, and His wonders in the field of Zoan; And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods that they could not drink. He sent different kinds of flies among them; which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them. He gave also their increase to the caterpillar, and their labor to the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts."

Great had been their deliverance. They well knew God's terrible acts upon their foes. He had shown that all instruments of vengeance subserved His will. All creation at His bidding would arise to plague. Their annals were the record of His power to avenge. But vain was the lesson. Provocation was their rule.

49-51. "He cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending destroying angels among them. He made a way for His anger; He spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; and smote all the first-born in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham."

Wrath terribly smote Egypt. Every form of plague spread desolation. All agents of evil did their ruthless work. Misery reached its height when the firstborn fell, and death was the inhabitant of each home. The evidence is clear that God, who delights in mercy, can righteously execute severity. Ah, sin! what have you done? Let us ponder and be wise!

52-55. "But made His own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. And He led them on safely, so that they feared not; but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And He brought them to the border of His sanctuary, even to this mountain, which His right hand had purchased. He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents."

It is sweet to return to views of God's gracious dealings. Behold Him guiding His own from this land of thralldom, as a shepherd tending his beloved flock. Behold Him preceding through the wilderness, and bringing them safely to the promised land. Behold Him driving the natives from their land, that Israel's tribes might settle in the goodly heritage. The history is an assurance that He will safely bring His own to the heavenly rest.

56-58. "Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not His testimonies. But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers; they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their engraved images."

Can it be that a people thus favored can forget their God, reject His testimonies, and provoke Him by idolatries! Alas! what evil will not man perpetrate! God was deserted. Altars to idols were erected.

59-64. "When God heard this He was angry, and greatly abhorred Israel. So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men; and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand. He gave His people over also to the sword; and was angry with His inheritance. The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage. Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation."

Warnings are here multiplied. God saw Israel's rebellion and raised the arm of vengeance. The tabernacle of His presence was deserted. The enemy came in like a flood. The inheritance was laid waste. Misery consumed the flower of their youth. Oh! let us dread the wrath of God. We are warned that He marks and punishes iniquity.

65-66. "Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouts by reason of wine. And He smote His enemies in the hinder parts; He put them to a perpetual reproach."

Here evidence returns that free grace reigns. Mercy rejects slumber. God is aroused and drives back the insulting foe. He inflicts terrible chastisement. When His people merit extremities of wrath, love will still love them.

67-69. "Moreover, He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim. But chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth

which He has established forever."

The tribe at first so honored receives mark of rejection. The Temple must not rise in Shiloh. Joseph must be humbled, and Judah must be honored with distinguishing favor. The Ark must be removed to rest on Mount Zion, and there the Temple--the joy of the whole earth--must show its glorious front. Let us again take warning. The Gospel is not restricted to one place. If it is not gladly welcomed and devoutly honored, God may remove it, and gladden others with the sound.

70-72. "He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes great with young He brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands."

God's mercy does not leave His people without the guidance of a wise Prince. He chooses David. He raises him from low estate, and places him on a high throne. He gives him skill and wisdom to rule in righteousness. Here we have our rightful King. The government is on the shoulders of our Jesus. Let us fall low before Him; and serve Him faithfully and love Him supremely. To us He is the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

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