

Covenantal Past, Present, and Future Hope – *Psalm 78:1-8, Matt 13:31-35*

Children of the Conquest #14

Introduction – The gospel of the kingdom of heaven is something more than getting people saved before they die so they can go to heaven. It is not only the story of people getting saved. It is the story of the supplanting of the old humanity with a new humanity (2 Cor 5:17-19) and it has been God's story since the Fall in the Garden (Gen 3:15). We are not to be about "having babies" as an end in itself. But the emphasis in this series has been about having and raising children because that is a central part in the work of the usurpation of the devil's work which is being accomplished over generations by the hand of God through His people. We are to disciple the nations. We are to take dominion of the created world. We are to do this as followers of Christ, as coregents with Christ, heralds for Christ, examples of Christ, and most importantly, as believers in Christ. He is doing the work and He is preparing the work for us to walk in.

I said this in CotC #1 – *"The world in which we live hates children, hates fatherhood and motherhood, hates the biblical teaching on marriage and family, and pours billions of dollars every year to encourage all (sometime subtly, but recently more and more explicitly) to join them in this hatred. We (our culture) hate long term commitments to anything. We have a view of our life as autonomous, disconnected, and selfishly declare 'my life for me.' The modern church teaches more and more that marriage, family, and children are 'add-ons,' condiments to the Christian life rather than central to disciple-making and obedience to the dominion mandate. Pessimistic eschatologies discourage long term vision casting and faith in the promises of God to a thousand generations. Sentimentalism (where the goal is a warm, cozy, agreeable family for me) brings discouragement, envy, jealousies and despair when things go screwy in the house..."* or, I would now add, when normal life happens.

As we conclude this series, I want us to see from the Word that our entire lives are a part of the work of God in the promised building of the kingdom of God in the world He redeemed with the blood of His Son.

The Past as Parable; The Parable for the Future (Psalm 78:1-8) – The psalmist sings that we must learn from the past, like a good ode/song about someone's life and the lessons we should gather. But it takes wisdom, for the past is a parable and a "dark saying," that is, a riddle or obscure proverb. Isn't that true? It's hard to immediately see what God is doing in the events in your own life; how much harder in the events of the past. But actually, the psalmist is arguing that by understanding and remembering what God has done in the past gives us insight into what He is doing now, and where He is taking it all in the future. A "parable" is a story which is "thrown alongside of" something else so we might learn by comparison. By looking at the history of God's covenant people as a parable, we learn from the past what God is doing even in our present. But what is weird here is that this real life is actually a parable God is telling; it's not just a made up story. (Side note: This is why history, to be taught correctly, must be taught in humble submission to the Story-teller).

Asaph may have up to five generations in view (vv3-6, "fathers...their children...the generation to come...their children...and their children"). So as your fathers teach the mighty works of God (history), listen to them and pass it on as the mighty works of God. And as your fathers teach you the consequences of sinfulness in the past, learn the lesson to "not be like your fathers" (v8). And we are to "give ear" not only to the stories of His mighty works, but to God's law as well (v1). This is the pattern for the covenant people of God. "I brought you out of the house of bondage – now live like this." Deliverance and direction.

A Parable of Past Forgetfulness – The covenant people of God forget who they are and what God has done – because they haven't been told and taught to interpret and apply, and/or because they become "a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God" (v8). New generations do not set their hope in God because they have forgotten the works of God (v7). "They did not keep covenant with God (primarily promise-believing), they refuse to walk in His ways (what a family is, what marriage is, what children are for, what a vocation is for, what taking dominion of the world for as God's people is all about) and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them (vv10-11)." Then they become fearful when trials come because "they did not remember His power; the day when He redeemed them from the enemy" (v42). This is a dark saying and warning – it is possible to be in the covenant and fall out of the blessings and into the deep curses that attend the covenant.

Parables for Future Hope – If we look back and see so much covenantal unfaithfulness, how are we to find any hope in our future, for our children's children's future, and for the kingdom of God? Jesus quotes v2 in Matt 13:34-35 when He speaks about the present and then the future of the kingdom of God. This is explained to us immediately following two short and full-of-hope parables about the kingdom of God.

Understanding the End – God's purpose in sending His Son into the world was to save the world (John 3:16-17). We are told that something revolutionary occurred to the world when the Father sent the Son (John 1:5, 1 John 2:8); darkness is passing and light is appearing. This Light to the Gentiles brings in the whole world. (Isaiah 49:6, Psalm 2:8-9, Rev 7:9).

Christ's coming was not to be a rescue operation, pulling out a few victims from the rubble. Christ's coming is described in terms of a new covenant, a new humanity, a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, a new world: a new culture.

Optimistic Parable Language – Think of the language that Jesus employs to describe the kingdom of God. He says it is like a wedding, not a funeral. It is a feast, not a fast; it is a pearl, not a lump of coal. And then there are the seed parables of growth, of separation and of harvest.

Mustard Seed and Leaven (Matt 13:31-33) – In both of these parables, the kingdom is far too small to really be significant in the mind of any reasonable person. In both parables, however, the end shows the unreasonableness of such thinking – the unfaithfulness of such thinking. What you see at a particular moment in history is not what you should believe to be the case forever. But more importantly is the teaching in these two parables of the nature of kingdom growth. It is organic, slow, and inevitable.

The Easy Yoke of Kingdom Building (Matt 11:25-30) – All of this is a dark parable, some riddle that only those whom Christ determines to reveal it will understand (vv25-27). And so, whether it is raising children or any other aspect of building the kingdom of God, everything we are to do in Christ Jesus we cannot do. None of it – we cannot save ourselves, we cannot purify ourselves, we cannot make ourselves holy. We cannot cause others to be saved, we cannot sanctify others, we cannot bring others to heaven. We cannot take dominion over anything in any kind of way that the holiness and perfection of God requires. We fall short in every way. But Jesus doesn't call the strong, He calls the weak. He doesn't call the rich, He calls the poor and needy. He doesn't call the self-made man, He calls the "babes," those who look pretty useless. He calls us to be yoked to Him and in that yoke find all His works to be an ease and not a burden, because He is doing them.

And so, starting with the small lump of leaven, with the smallest seed of the garden, with the most needy of people, in the most difficult and broken circumstances that you may find your life to be in right now, He promises to grow His kingdom. We work, but we find that these are simply works He has prepared for us to walk in (Eph 2:10). We believe and walk in the promises of God for His people and it will be that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9). This is the parable of life, all of life, and your life in Christ.