

FATHERHOOD – Part Eight
“THE PASSING DOWN OF FAITH”
Sermon 9/08/20/19

Over the past several months we have looked at the relationship between Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their sons. We saw how their faults and their family traits were passed down from generation to generation and how they negatively impacted the lives of these men and their families. But no man is entirely bad and no father's life is fully worthless. There is both good and bad in each of us. Today I want to look at the good things which each of these fathers did in spite of or even because of their weaknesses.

In Adam we saw a man who started with everything God had to offer and ended up losing most of it. He was given a garden to tend, animals to name, a world to rule over and a wife to help him. He started out well but as soon as temptation came onto the scene the good man that God created from the dust of the earth seemed to fade into the background and Adam's lack of character and moral weakness came to the forefront, causing the world and all who followed after him to suffer the consequences of his lack of obedience.

When we first looked at the descendants of Adam, we saw how his oldest son Cain followed in his father's footsteps. Like Adam, Cain heard the voice of the Lord warning him to not allow sin to rule over him. But he ignored it, just as Adam had, and let sin reign in his heart, causing him to kill his younger brother in a jealous rage.

But Cain is not the only son Adam had. He had two other sons as well - Abel whom Cain killed and Seth, born after the death of Abel and after God had punished Cain by sending him away. We know very little about Abel but what we do see is very encouraging. Abel was a man who pleased God. He knew what the Lord required for an offering from his flock and he brought the appropriate one. That is not much but it does reveal something very significant about him. Abel had a heart that was willing to honor the Lord with the first fruits of his labor. Somehow he had a sense of what an appropriate offering was. And where would he have learned that except from his father Adam.

The New Testament does tell us a little more about Abel. In Matthew (23:35) Jesus calls Abel a righteous man. We are also told that Abel was a man of faith; for in Hebrews 11:4 Paul says of him: *“By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.”*

Adam would have instructed both his sons in what the Lord required for an offering, be it from the field or from the flocks. Abel was a man of faith, a prophet, and a righteous man, who willingly followed his father's teaching. Cain did not. As for Adam's youngest son, Seth, all we know is that after he had a son of his own the Scriptures say, *“Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord”* (Genesis 4:26). This is not an insignificant statement, for it shows a continuation of a relationship with the Lord. And the knowledge of that relationship had to have come from his father Adam.

But it did not stop there. What we see from the genealogy of Seth is that 517 years after the birth of Seth his great-great-great-grandson Enoch was born – a man whom the Scriptures say

“Walked with God; and he was no more for God took him.” Enoch was the first man who did not die but went directly out of the presence of men and into the presence of God. And when another 467 years go by after the birth of Enoch his 5x great-grandfather Noah was born whom the Scriptures say, *“was a righteous man, blameless in his time”* (Genesis 6:9).

What we see coming from the descendants of Adam and Eve - the man and woman who brought sin into the world, were cursed by God, and expelled from the Garden of Eden because of their disobedience – is a line of righteous people. We see from both Abel and Seth that parents can repent of their sin and begin to live righteously once again. Adam and Eve heard the words and commands of God directly from the Lord Himself, and it appears they passed down these same instructions not only to their children but to successive generations as well.

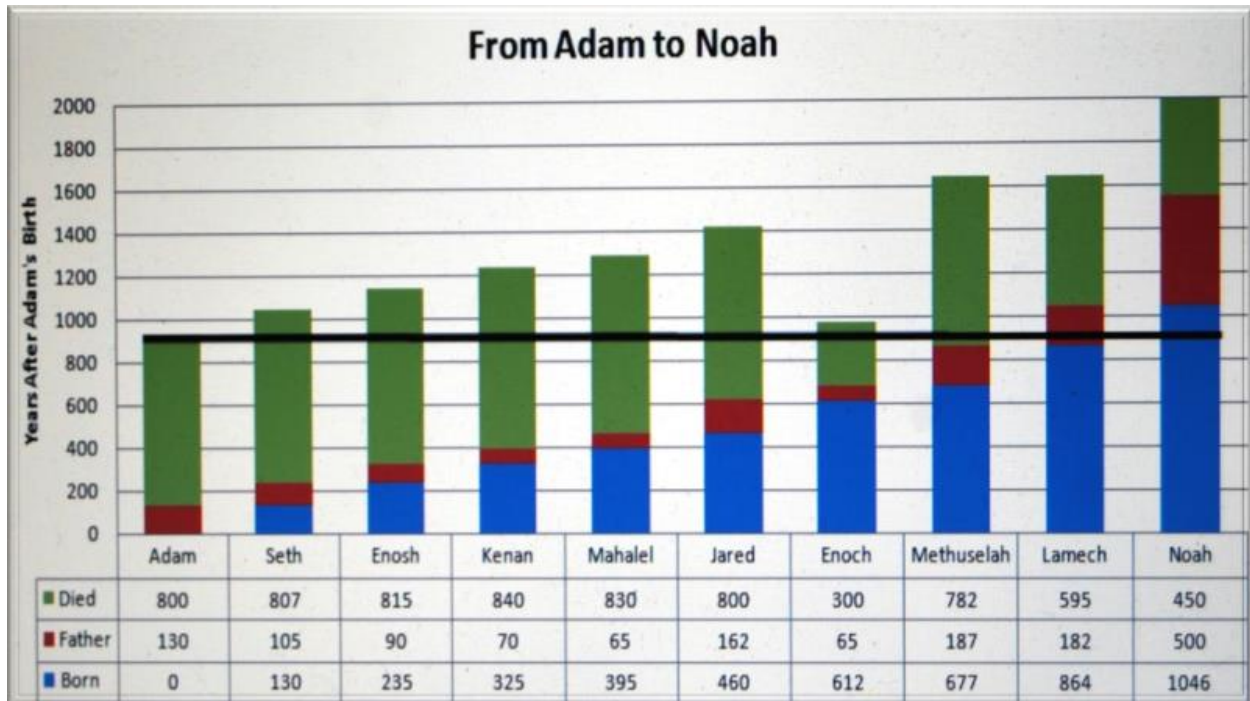
Even though Cain, like his parents, chose to rebel, their sons Abel and Seth did not. And where else would they have acquired a sense of righteous duty except from their parents? Through the sons of Adam we see that Abel, in spite of the bad influence of his older brother, was strong enough to resist the sin prevalent in his family line and rise above it. We also see that Seth also did not follow in his brother Cain’s footsteps and rebel but rather followed the Lord’s precepts, teaching them to his children and his children’s children. Scripture shows that even those born 7 generations after Seth followed the Lord.

Because of the righteousness passed down through the line of Seth, his descendant Noah was able to save himself, his wife, his sons and their wives from the flood which destroyed all the other human inhabitants of the earth. One bad apple may ruin a whole batch of apples, but one bad seed from a parent does not spoil the entire family line.

One never knows what consequences the actions we take today will have on future generations. Yet there is hope even in our failures; for though sin entered the world and stained every descendant of Adam and Eve, a remnant of righteous men survived throughout the centuries. The descendants of Adam continually called on the name of the Lord. This may be attributed not only to the faith of the descendants of Adam, but also to Adam’s lifelong influence over his family.

As unbelievable as it may seem, when Noah’s father Lamech was born (8 generations away from the creation of Adam) both Adam and his son Seth were still alive. Adam and Seth both died before Noah was born, but Noah’s 5x great grandfather did not pass away until 84 years after his birth. Even his nearest grandfather, his father’s father, did not die until the year of the flood, when Noah was 600 years old. Though his great-grandfather Enoch was taken up to Heaven by Lord before Noah was born, Noah’s father, grandfather, and his 2, 3, 4, and 5x great grandfathers were all alive during some parts of Noah’s life.

As you can see from the chart below, there were many generations of Noah’s family alive who continually influenced him towards God and whose faith contributed to his being *“blameless in his time”* (Genesis 6:9). Yet it is also true that by the time Noah was born the Scriptures say mankind as a whole had descended into total evil so that every intent of the thoughts of their hearts were only evil continually. Despite all the evil He saw, God chose a descendant of Adam’s son Seth to be the one through whom His mercy was shown; and by so doing kept the family line of Adam and Seth alive.



One might not think that anything good could come from the family who introduced sin into the world. But Noah is just one of the proofs that it can. God chose Noah and his family to rise above the flood waters while he purged the earth of evil men. But evil reentered the world through the sin of Noah's son Ham. Not that his other two sons Shem and Japheth were without their faults; for the Scriptures tell us that *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). But when we look at the descendants of Shem and Japheth, we see something that is not seen in the descendants of Ham.

The point of this history lesson is that Noah was a righteous man who had three sons. But the integrity of this blameless man was not passed down to all of them. Each made their own choice to follow or not follow their father's example. Ham obviously decided not to. In countries where the descendants of Ham lived, we see idolatry, slavery, oppression and further corruption of God's creation run rampant. Looking at Japheth's descendants we see countries from which paganism would thrive, but also lands in which Christianity would prosper. A thread of righteous living ran through the line of Japheth which would eventually give rise to the Reformation in Europe.

But it is through the descendants of Shem that the continuation of Noah's faith in His creator is evidenced most clearly. While not much is said about Shem, we do know that a legacy of faith was passed down through this line. Nine generations after Noah, God called a man to leave his home and move to the future land of Israel. That man was Abraham, one of Shem's descendants. This is the man whom God declared would be the father of many nations, whose descendants would be as numerous as the sand of the seashore and the stars in the night sky.

And so, from the line of Shem came a man who heard the voice of the Lord and obeyed, just as his 8x great grandfather Noah had done when he heard the voice of the Lord. From the descendants of Abraham would come the future kings of Israel and eventually the Messiah Himself. So we see that even when some children born into a righteous man's family forsake the

Lord, the influence of their father's righteousness can still be passed down to future generations.

When we look at Abraham, we see a man chosen of God, yet a man of faults as well. As mentioned last week the deception that was inherent in his family line was first revealed in his life. Yet his moments of deception were very minor in comparison to the faith which he displayed. And that faith is the foundation of all who are descended from Abraham as well as all who come to faith in Christ (Romans 4:11-17; Galatians 3:29).

Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham passed down his faith to both of his sons. Isaac embraced it. Ishmael did not. And so it is through the promised son Isaac that the promise of a nation of righteous people was born. Isaac accepted the torch of faith from his father and in turn passed his faith down to his two sons, Jacob and Esau.

Though none of us start out as righteous, the possibility of becoming righteous by faith in the one true God existed through their father Isaac, just as it had through their grandfather Abraham. Unfortunately, Esau, a weak man ruled by his fleshly appetites, followed the example of his cousin Ishmael and did not respond to the call of righteousness. But when God called to Jacob, he paid attention; and I believe it was because of what his father Isaac had taught and demonstrated to him through a life of righteous living.

God says throughout the pages of the Bible that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was possible because of the legacy of faith which these men passed down to their sons. Like Ishmael and Esau, not all their sons responded to the call of God, but all knew the call because their fathers had heard it, responded positively to it, and lived it.

As for the sons of Jacob, they became the root from which the Hebrew people descended. The faith of their father Jacob was passed down to each of them and they in turn passed it down to their descendants. Jacob may have started out deceitful but several encounters with his God changed him. We know from our Bible that his son Joseph was the one who was favored and used by God to save his immediate family from the famine which enveloped their land. But unlike previous generations when only one of two sons followed in their father's footsteps of faith, it appears that all twelve of Jacob's sons, despite their sin, remained faithful to their God.

We see this at the very least when Joseph's brothers realized that God was punishing them for their betrayal of Joseph and the lie they told their father concerning him. They recognized that God held them accountable for their actions and was capable of punishing them for the evil they had done. This understanding of God was passed down from their father Jacob and it made a deep impression on them.

What we also see occurring through these twelve sons of Jacob is that even after 400 years of slavery in Egypt their descendants were following the Lord. How do we know this? Moses was the great-great-grandfather of Levi, the third son of Jacob and Leah. And we know that Moses' father and mother were righteous parents who raised their son Aaron and daughter Miriam to honor the Lord. By the time their youngest son Moses was born, Pharaoh had decreed that all male children born to the Hebrews must be killed. In the hope of saving his life, Moses' parents hid him for three months before they put him in a wicker basket covered with tar and pitch and sent him down the river to be rescued.

This action was ordained by God as Moses was seen and rescued by none other than

Pharaoh's own daughter who raised him as her own. Although he grew up in Pharaoh's palace the Scriptures tell us that Moses knew he was born a Hebrew and not an Egyptian. And this connection was not a distant memory for him but was part of his adult life as well. In fact it was a strong enough connection that when he saw an Egyptian beating a fellow Hebrew, he struck him down and buried him in the sand.

Unfortunately, his deed was seen by another Hebrew and as a result Moses was forced to leave Egypt. But in the wilderness God called to Him and sent him back to Egypt to free His people from slavery. Through this calling we see once again the inheritance of faith in the descendants of his great-great-great grandfather Jacob; for when Moses returns, he assembles all the elders of the sons of Israel and spoke the words which the Lord had spoken to him. He then performed the signs which the Lord had given to him in the sight of all the people. And what was their response? The Scriptures say,

EXODUS 4:29-31

"...the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshipped"

Even in their affliction as slaves of Pharaoh, the descendants of Jacob kept a tight hold on their faith. Four centuries had passed since Jacob and his family moved to the land of Egypt and yet we see no diminished faith. They continued to hold to the promise God made to Abraham five generations earlier; that He would rescue them from the land of slavery and deliver them to the land He had promised.

But we are not naive. We know that this line of faith from one generation to another did not include everyone who left Egypt. Even as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob left Egypt under the leadership of Moses trouble began to brew. Doubts about the ability of God to keep them safe from Pharaoh's army and His ability to provide food and water in the wilderness caused these people to grumble and complain constantly. After wandering the desert for 40 years because of their unbelief, all who left Egypt died, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. They alone, out of all who had left Egypt were able to enter the Promised Land because they remained faithful to the Lord.

This shows, even in the midst of overwhelming odds, that faith continued in the line of Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim, Caleb from the tribe of Judah, and Moses from the tribe of Levi, were all descendants of the sons of Jacob. Jacob was the son of Isaac and Isaac the son of Abraham. Abraham was descended from the line of Shem who was the son of Noah who was the great-grandson of Enoch who was the great-great-great-great-grandson of Seth who was the son of Adam. By the time we come to Amran, the father of Moses, we have seen 24 family generations descended from Adam who have held on to faith in the Lord their God. Even those born in Egypt such as Moses, Caleb and Joshua retained the faith of their ancestors making a total of 25 generations of faithful people.

In spite of all the bad we have seen in these men and their sons, faith in the true God of Israel remained an integral part of the family line. This probably speaks more to the faithfulness of God who remains faithful even when we are not (2 Timothy 2:13) than it does the faithfulness of Adam's descendants. Nevertheless, it does show that despite some bad apples in the family tree, when children are taught who God is by the words and examples of their parents, there is hope that

the faith of the parents will also become the faith of their children.

We have seen much unrighteousness occurring in the family line of Adam, beginning with Adam himself. But we have also seen that Adam did not remain in sin but passed down a heritage of faith to his sons. This was possible because of the covering God made for him through the shedding of blood. And this legacy of faith continued to influence future generations. Not all walked in faith. But as I mentioned last week it only takes one man seeking after righteousness to break the hold of sin on a family. If somewhere in the family its members turn to God for the removal of their sin and seek His face in order to live righteous lives, then the sins of previous generations need not be passed down through them to future generations. We see this occurring at the very least with Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, as well as Jacob and all twelve of his sons, especially Joseph, but also Levi, Ephraim, and Judah who bore Moses, Joshua and Caleb.

You may or may not be descended from a people of faith; they may have been people who either embraced or rejected faith for generations. Your own family may contain a mixture of those who are following in your footsteps and live a life of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ or have gone astray from that which they were taught. But, as I have said previously, we are not responsible for the choices our children make, only for those we make ourselves.

As disappointing as it is when our children do not follow the Lord, they will, as will we, stand before the throne of a righteous God and receive what we deserve for the things done in the body, whether good or bad (1 Corinthians 5:10). I may not see my great-great grandfathers there, for I come from an unbelieving family and do not know if they were believers or not. But this I do know. I will see my children and my grandchildren there, for I have passed down my legacy of faith to my children and they have done the same to theirs.

My heart was not open to the gospel because of the life of a relative. I had a good friend in college whose life influenced me to look into the Christian faith. It was his example and not my family's that led me to the Lord. And this is an important point. It is God's design that families pass down their legacy of faith to future generations. But if they don't God will use others to bring us to Himself. God uses friends and family members alike to convince others to become the starting point from which their faith can be passed down to future generations. For this reason, it is important we shine the light of truth wherever you go.

In today's journey through the descendants of Adam we have seen both those who have embraced their father's faith and those who have not. Yet we have also seen that despite the sins of their fathers, future generations were able to pass down a legacy of faith to multitudes of generations after them. I hope this is encouraging to you; for this list of Biblical characters shows that even in families where some have embraced the faith and some have not, a legacy of faith can still be passed down to successive generations by those who walk in righteousness.

Don't let your heart be discouraged by those who are not currently following the Lord, even those closest to you. There is still hope. Your example of faith does not go unnoticed; even your obvious sins are not enough to prevent your children from coming to faith in Christ. For if, in spite of the disobedience of Adam, men of righteousness such as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham can arise; and if, despite the deceitfulness of Jacob, righteous men such as Moses, Caleb and Joshua step forth to lead a nation, then there is hope for your family line. All God requires of you is to

walk by faith and to pass that faith down to future generations.

Who knows, you too might become someone whom future generations point to and say, *“This is where my legacy of faith comes from. This is where the family line of disobedience was stopped. This is the man or woman who took a stand and said, ‘As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.’ Because of that man or that woman I, and generations before me, have come to believe in Christ. I and my family are blessed because they took a stand for Christ.”* May this be our legacy – a legacy of faith passed down from generation to generation - who in turn pass down the lovingkindness of the Lord to a thousand generations after them - because we made the choice to give our lives in love and service to Him. Amen.

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