



INTERGENERATIONAL FAITH - PASSING THE BATON

Text: Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Hebrews 12:1-3

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When I was a young lad I was tall and skinny and I could really run. Obviously nowhere near like Usain Bolt. But I was fast. I remember being in a relay race once where I was the final runner. We were coming in at about third when the baton was passed on to me. I ran with all I had and won the race. My jubilation was short lived because I soon discovered that our team had been disqualified. The passing of the baton between the second and third runners had not been done properly. They had taken too long and crossed the line. A good track coach will tell you that a relay race is won or lost in the transfer of the baton. The reading in Hebrews 12 describes our spiritual life in terms of a race. It describes a huge stadium of spectators cheering us on as we run. And encouraging us to run with everything we have. As the writer says *"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus..."* Being disciples of Jesus requires focus and everything we have. We are never to lose sight of Jesus and we must never give up. Now this race is not just a single sprint. It's a relay. It's intergenerational. The faith is to be passed on from one generation to the next. This morning we are seeing the passing of the baton in the baptism of little Florence. Andrew and Judy, and all of us have made promises in how we will live so we model the faith and instruct our children about Jesus. How we pass on the faith, how we pass on the baton is crucial. Much is at stake. It has been often quoted that: 'The church is always one generation from extinction'. Will our children know God and be faithful to him? Will they run with us, or give up the race?

This is the issue we find in Deuteronomy 6. The scene here is that the Israelites are about to cross the Jordan River and go into the Promised Land. After forty years of wandering in the desert with the Israelites Moses is now reconfirming God's

relationship with them. (Deuteronomy means- 'second law'). Moses is not only giving the adults a reminder of God's law and how to live in the new land. He is also ensuring that the baton of the faith is passed on. Note verse 1&2 "*These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, SO THAT you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live...*" In New Testament terms: 'Here is what God has told me to tell you to make sure your kids are followers of Jesus as well'. Moses here gives a set of instructions. He says their way of life is to be very focused and come down to one thing- to recognize only one God and live for him totally. Note verse 4 &5: "*Hear O Israel: The Lord our God the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" Now how can we ensure we love God with our entire being, with every thought, and word and action? Well Moses says (verse 6): "*These commands I give you today are to be upon your hearts.*" This is significant. The 'heart' deals with the deep inner self, the real you; that which motivates your desires and thinking. As Jesus said: "*From the abundance of the heart come forth the thoughts and words of a man.*" So when Moses says "*These commands are to be upon your hearts...*" he does not mean that we have some head knowledge about the Bible. He means that the commands of God- the Word of God- is to touch the real inner you. The Word of God is to inspire and motivate you in everything. [POWER POINT x2PICTURES] For example, you know with a car we have a motor to get us going and brakes to help us stop. Too often we have our own desires that come from deep within and then we find God's commands act like a break to stop us. But Moses means that God's Word, his commands, are not just to be our moral breaks, but the engine, the motor that fires us up and is the driving force in all we do.

Now this understanding is very important because Christians can often live double lives, one part is religious, for God and the other part isn't. We can be very religious on Sunday at church, but on Monday at work Christians can leave a lot to be desired in their behavior. Our home life is not always such an example of the faith either. This duality has a huge impact on how we pass on the baton of the faith to the next generation. Kids can smell hypocrisy a mile away, even before they know what that word means. That's why Moses says of God's commands in verse 8&9 "*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.*" Like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, you

can still see Jews today with their phylacteries- little boxes with a portion of scripture tied to their foreheads and on their wrists and hands. What this symbolizes is that God's Word is to influence, to drive what we think and do in all areas of life. If something is tied to our hands then whatever work we do with our hands we see this symbol. So whether we are out on the job, or in the office, in the classroom, in the kitchen, we are to do it God's way. If we have something between our eyes then wherever you look you will see it. So with the Word of God. Whatever we look at- books, TV, internet, traveling and taking in the views, the Word of God is to be the focus control. The reference to writing the commands on the *'doorframes of the houses'* says: Whatever happens in this house is directed by God's Word. So your marriage relationship, your attitude to your children and how you raise them, how you define your families material needs. The words *'on the gates'* is a reference to the village elders sitting at the town gates. In the tradition of the day, that's where they made decisions for the community or adjudicated cases brought to them. So it symbolized that the whole of community life was to be guided by God's commands. So for us, God's Word should guide our attitude towards education, politics, sports, entertainment and so on. You see, that is what it means to be disciples of Jesus. Being a disciple is not just saying we will turn up to church on a Sunday. We are saying Jesus is our Lord and Master. We are his disciples so the whole of our lives are to reflect that Jesus is our Lord. That is what Moses is getting at here in Old Testament imagery. Now if we think it's a bit rich to serve Jesus with all we have and are, just remember what God gave, what Jesus gave on the cross to bring us reconciliation. Giving our all, running with all we have focused on Jesus, is the only worthy response. So we are called to love God with *"...all our heart and soul and strength"*.

Now I say all this for a purpose, which is to pass on the baton of the faith to the next generation. If we don't strive to follow Jesus in all of life we will struggle to pass on the baton. You can't pass on what you don't know. If you don't really love Jesus how can you teach your kids? That is the issue here. Have a look at what is right in the middle of this text. Note verse 7. *"Impress them (i.e. the commands I give you today) 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."* This is how we pass on the baton of faith. The first thing we notice is how all encompassing the instruction is. It's about recognizing that every moment of the day we have an opportunity to teach our children about Jesus: last thing at night, first thing in the morning, sitting at home,

traveling. How do you do that? Does it mean 'God talk' all day? Wouldn't it tire you out trying to think up stuff? That's not the point. It's about what comes naturally in day to day life. It's about doing what Moses says: "*These commands are to be upon your hearts.*" If the word of God is your motivating engine, then how you act in everything will be a model for the children to follow. What you are full of will bubble up. It reminds me of a Tasmania apple cider I used to buy. It used to annoy me that almost invariably when I opened a bottle it would come spurting out. What it was full of naturally bubbled forth.

Now, there are some helpful tips here to help us as parents in our task of passing on the baton. First we see that we are to "impress [the command]s on your children". The Hebrew can mean to "...repeat the commands to your children". There is the sense that you repeat the teachings till they get it. You repeat the teachings till it makes a real impression. Now we're not talking about brow beating here, going on at the kids till they are sick of it. I suspect that's why over the years I have heard parents say 'We will let the kids make up their own minds about religion. We don't want to push it down their throats.' But we must understand that far too much is at stake to just let the kids chose, as if Christianity is one of various religious options in life, and it doesn't particularly matter which you chose. It's a matter of life and death, of eternal life or hell. Jesus did not die on the cross and suffer the agony of hell just to provide another option. Jesus, through his death and resurrection provides the way home to the Father. Jesus said "*I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.*" Too much is at stake. So impress it upon the children. Repeat it till they get it. What that implies is that we as parents live a consistent life of following Jesus. That's how the teaching gets repeated and makes an impression. The kids see the faith lived every day. And when done well, by the grace of God's Spirit, it bears fruit. Over the years I have had the pleasure of interviewing young people for profession of faith and they have shared how they recognized God calling them through the repeated messages they got a home, at church, at school, in youth gatherings. Yes, our children need to respond to God for themselves. But to do that they need to hear about God. The need to be taught, have the Christian life modeled, experience it in worship.

Now to be teaching our children it means we need to have a relationship with our children. Because how can we expect to teach these things to our kids if we spend little time with them? Did you notice how Moses said "*Talk about them when you sit*

at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." What Moses says here assumes lots of time being together in natural settings. This is a tough issue for us. It was different in Moses day. Even up till recent history, sons would work all day with the fathers on the farm or in the trade. Daughters would assist their mothers in cooking, sowing, and all that needed to happen around the house. There was lots of time to talk, to share insights, to pass on the faith. Now in our overwhelmingly busy society where do we find such time? It's not easy, but as we said there is a lot a stake. So be creative. Revive the tradition of table devotions after a meal. Read Bible stories before bed. On a drive, talk about God's creation. As the kids get older, share your own story and how you relate with God. But also be aware that as you drive you are setting an example. If you speed and are aggressive it doesn't exactly help you try and chat about God's grace. Talking of grace it's important that you share your struggles and how you feel God's grace. That is a very important example to set. So note two things in impressing God's ways on the kids: (1) sharing the truth, talking about God, and (2) being examples, backing up what you say with what you do. Will you be a perfect example? No! There again you set the example as you repent of your wrong and seek forgiveness. For our children to know about forgiveness and grace they need to see it in our lives. They need to experience it; to see it and feel it. And not just know it as nice Bible talk.

So, Andrew and Judy, and all of us, let me encourage you. As we run the race of Christian life, let's be very mindful of how we pass on the baton. As the apostle Peter said in his Pentecost sermon: "*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off- for all whom the Lord our God will call.*" Our faith is to be intergenerational. Our parents passed it on to us. Now it's our turn to pass it on. Let's keep passing the baton till God's kingdom comes.