

#271 "Leaving a Proper Legacy"

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In America, there is a growing realization that, due to a variety of economic factors and forces, the next generation will likely have a far lower standard of living than those who preceded them. But, while this may be unfortunate and true, it is not the most important thing that the next generation must consider. Wealth is so-overemphasized in western culture, and hedonism, materialism, and consumerism have done their damage. Parents of children who will grow up in the coming years need to make wise financial decisions, but, more importantly, they need to leave a legacy of righteousness for their children. Proverbs 13:22 says, "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous." While not squandering what God entrusts people with matters, not everybody can give their children and grandchildren an inheritance of money. But they can give something more valuable, and that is a legacy of godliness and an example of faith and obedience. As Proverbs 16:16 says, "How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver." The fact is that children and grandchildren who learn wisdom, even if they have little financially, will be better off than if they had all the money in the world and lacked wisdom. Leaving a legacy of righteousness requires a perspective that invests in the future and that isn't consumed with self.

King Hezekiah, the most righteous of the kings of Judah (2 Kings 18:5), had just experienced a miraculous healing of God (Isaiah 38, 2 Kings 20:1-11). He had gotten mortally sick in the middle of his life, and he was overcome with sorrow. But he prayed that God would extend his life, and God answered Him and promised him an additional fifteen years. But something happened in King Hezekiah's heart toward the end of his life. Foolishly, he showed some Babylonian envoys all the treasures of his house and kingdom (Isaiah 39, 2 Kings 20:12-21). They sent him letters and a present, having heard that he had been sick, and Hezekiah listened to them and was influenced enough to show them every treasure in the kingdom. The Babylonians were able to scope out a future military target, and Hezekiah, by not seeking God's insight or thinking of future generations, showed them many reasons to come and take them over. Isaiah rebuked Hezekiah for what he had done. He said to him in 2 Kings 20:17-18, "'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the Lord. 'Some of your sons who shall issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away; and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" Isaiah issued God's judgment that Judah would be carried off into captivity to Babylon, the very people to whom Hezekiah had just showcased the treasure of the kingdom. Despite that horrific proclamation from the Lord, Hezekiah's response was, "'The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good.' For he thought, 'Is it not so, if there will be peace and truth in my days?'" (2 Kings 20:19b). This was a terrible way to close out his life, especially after God's compassionate miracle to him of extending his life. He was only thinking about himself, not of his nation, of his children, or of the future. He wasn't

upset by the prophecy or even moved because he heard only what he wanted to hear. His selfish perspective enabled him to hear that he himself would not have to endure the coming captivity, only his sons. Thus, because of his corrupt thinking, he was content to celebrate his royalty and live out his days in peace. His life would be easy, and his thoughts concerning a bad future to which he had just contributed was, "What's it to me?"

Hezekiah forgot something very important. He failed to remember that he was the beneficiary of a legacy and history of godly people before him. Sure, they weren't all righteous, but before the kingdom was divided there was King David, a man after God's own heart. The kingdom which Hezekiah had was a shell of its former glory, but there was still glory. He reaped the benefit of all that David had fought for and that many righteous men had stood for and even given their lives for. It is as if he began to think that he was special or entitled, and he failed to consider that it was his responsibility to pass the glory of a kingdom consecrated to God to future generations of Israel. The fact is that it is easy to forget the past, to fail to be thankful, and to take for granted what others have sacrificed for and even died to testify to. It is also easy to become consumed with self especially when circumstances are easy, improved, or guaranteed. Hezekiah knew exactly how long he would live, and it may have been that he lost the urgency and fervency that he should have had to honor the Lord each day. Life is a fleeting thing, but it seems Hezekiah let his special promise allow his heart to grow callous, cold, and unconcerned for the future of God's people who are called by His name. His love for God should have made him want to live every last day of his new fifteen years for God's glory and to explain to each and every last Israelite Who God is and how to live for Him. Like the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:19 which lost their zeal for God, Hezekiah needed to repent and regain his passion and devotion for good works and godliness (Titus 2:14).

Hezekiah, despite the many good things that he did in his life, didn't leave the godly legacy that he could have. His son who succeeded him was Manasseh, one of the most wicked of all the kings of Judah (2 Kings 21:2-9). He put idols in the house of God, rebuilt the pagan high places that his father had torn down, practiced witchcraft, and seduced Israel "to do evil more than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel" (v. 9). In fact, even after Josiah, the second king after Manasseh, led Judah in repentance in a great revival, 2 Kings 23:26 says, "However, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him." Manasseh wasn't even around anymore, but still what he had done in leading the nation into wickedness was so severe that on account of his legacy future generations would have to pay the penalty. 2 Kings 23:27 says, "The Lord said, 'I will remove Judah also from My sight, as I have removed Israel. And I will cast off Jerusalem, this city which I have chosen, and the temple of which I said, 'My name shall be there.'" Manasseh did evil because he was evil, and the nation would pay for following along with his deceptions. But Hezekiah should have known better, he should have cared, and he should have used the bonus years he was given as an opportunity to turn the nation back before it was too late (c.f. Jonah 3:10). Yet even his own son, the next king, was a pagan disaster.

The best investment parents and grandparents can make is to use the time that God gives them to teach their children and grandchildren the ways of God. Future generations need to hear the Word of God

and see how it has transformed the lives of those before them. Wealth is a nice inheritance, for life does cost money. But better than money is wisdom, and growing in the understanding and worship of God is the best thing to pass forward. It will be a blessing to future generations, regardless of the kind of world that they might face. Even in captivity, the terrible future that God had promised Israel for a time, some of Israel including Daniel and his three friends worshipped God still, and it is likely that they had somebody before them who taught them Scripture and showed them the way.

A testimony is what people believe and stand for, but a legacy continues on through the lives of those whom they have impacted and influenced. Legacy is impacted by testimony, and it makes a difference for generations. Hezekiah did a lot well, but he didn't finish well or leave a God-honoring legacy through his son. Life in Christ needs to be run to the finish line (Philippians 3:14) so that everything that could be done to leave a proper legacy will have been done. As Paul said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).