

**Saviour:**  
**Saviour through Constant Rebellion**  
**Psalm 78**

March 19, 2017

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**Introduction:** : Easter is on Sunday, April 16, this year. On the Thursday and Friday of Holy Week, our Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra along with **Ballet Magnificat** will present a musical oratorio titled, *Saviour*. **Ballet Magnificat** is a professional Christian ballet company that has been described as the premiere Christian dance company in the United States. Their professional touring companies have performed both nationally and internationally.

I have been listening to this music in preparation for preaching now through Easter. It is stirring and worshipful. This work is about God's passion for His people. The story, which takes us from creation through resurrection, is a picture of God pursuing His people.

To prepare us for own reflection and celebration of Easter, I want to explore the same theme of **Saviour** for our preaching times between now and Easter. I want to pursue that same idea that we see woven into Scripture that God's passionate pursuit of us did not start at the cross.

His passionate pursuit of us that calls us to relationship started at creation, and we continue to see it in the fall. The fall, we said last week, points us to the continuing, central conflict of history. But, in this conflict of sin, there is grace!

I want to continue to explore that theme today. I want us to see a summary of the ongoing rebellion of our lives. Israel's history points to that. Our text today is Psalms 78. I point you to this Scripture because it is a teaching psalm. Its primary purpose seems to be to teach us through some of the negative examples of Israel's history. In their rebellion, let us see our rebellion, and the only remedy to resolve this rebellion. Let's start with the first eight verses.

**Text:** My people, hear my instruction;  
listen to what I say.

<sup>2</sup>I will declare wise sayings;

I will speak mysteries from the past—

<sup>3</sup>things we have heard and known

and that our fathers have passed down to us.

<sup>4</sup>We must not hide them from their children,

but must tell a future generation

the praises of the LORD,

His might, and the wonderful works

He has performed.

<sup>5</sup>He established a testimony in Jacob

and set up a law in Israel,

which He commanded our fathers

to teach to their children

<sup>6</sup>so that a future generation—

children yet to be born—might know.  
They were to rise and tell their children  
7 so that they might put their confidence in God  
and not forget God's works,  
but keep His commands.  
8 Then they would not be like their fathers,  
a stubborn and rebellious generation,  
a generation whose heart was not loyal  
and whose spirit was not faithful to God.

**Introduction:** The Psalmist begins with an introductory statement to listen to the instruction that would prevent the ongoing rebellion of Israel. He is imploring his generation to not make the same mistakes of the past. He moves from this opening plea to a rather long commentary of some of the major illustrations of Israel's historic rebellion.

Though the Psalmist does not always move in chronological order, Psalm 78 is based around three illustrations of ancient Israel's rebellion.

- The Exit from Egypt
- The Experience in the Wilderness
- The Entry into the Promised Land

All three of these periods are rather illustrative of the ongoing rebellion. Perhaps, another example that is profitable for our consideration is the Period of the Judges. Judges continues the history of Israel after their entry into the Promised Land. Judges 2:10 indicates exactly how disappointing the situation was. The next generation neither knew the LORD or what He had done. There is a lesson for us here. Revival today is no guarantee for the strength of our relationship tomorrow. We must live in constant, daily relationship with God.

The book of Judges is organized around a cycle. Israel's history during this period went like this. First, there was disobedience. Then, God disciplined Israel by allowing them to endure oppression from foreign invaders. Next, Israel cried out for mercy, which led to God raising up a deliverer or a judge who delivered them from the foreign oppressor. Unfortunately, once the judge died, Israel returned to their disobedient ways, thus beginning the cycle again.

Far too many Christians live in a cycle of sin. Perhaps our reason for living out this cycle of sin is the same as that of Israel. If we only deal with the consequences of sin without dealing with the cause of sin (our rebellion), we will always deal with the cycle of sin.

To me, Judges is a case study on the depravity of humanity. Left to our own devices, this is where we end up every time. Judges 17:6 and Judges 21:25 provide the reason for the depravity: "Everyone did as he saw fit."

### **What do we learn about our own rebellion from Israel's rebellion?**

1. They forgot to remember.

The instruction in verses 1-8 is to declare what they knew of God's provision in the past. Verse 9 begins to list of some of those great works.

The Ephraimite archers turned back  
on the day of battle.

<sup>10</sup>They did not keep God's covenant  
and refused to live by His law.

<sup>11</sup>They **forgot** what He had done,  
the wonderful works He had shown them.

<sup>12</sup>He worked wonders in the sight of their fathers  
in the land of Egypt, the region of Zoan.

<sup>13</sup>He split the sea and brought them across;  
the water stood firm like a wall.

<sup>14</sup>He led them with a cloud by day  
and with a fiery light throughout the night.

<sup>15</sup>He split rocks in the wilderness  
and gave them drink as abundant as the depths.

<sup>16</sup>He brought streams out of the stone  
and made water flow down like rivers.

<sup>17</sup>But they continued to sin against Him,  
rebellious in the desert against the Most High.

The list continues in verse 18—water from a rock, manna (which he calls the food of angels), meat when they complained about the manna and yet verse 32 offers the same summary of the response of Israel. "Despite all this, they kept sinning and did not believe His wonderful works."

One of the reasons for our rebellion is that we don't acknowledge God for His many blessings. One of the ironies of this text and our lives is the continued sin despite God's miraculous works, and God's continued grace despite our continued disobedience.

## 2. They **faked their repentance.**

Look at verse 34.

When He killed some of them,  
the rest began to seek Him;  
they repented and searched for God.

<sup>35</sup>They remembered that God was their rock,  
the Most High God, their Redeemer.

<sup>36</sup>But they **deceived Him with their mouths,**  
**they lied to Him with their tongues,**

<sup>37</sup>their hearts were insincere toward Him,  
and they were unfaithful to His covenant.

This is a recurring response from Old Testament Israel. Hosea 6 is a place where we see this same idea.

Israel's Words:

Come, let us return to the LORD.  
For He has torn us,  
and He will heal us;  
He has wounded us,  
and He will bind up our wounds.  
<sup>2</sup> He will revive us after two days,  
and on the third day He will raise us up  
so we can live in His presence.  
<sup>3</sup> Let us strive to know the LORD.  
His appearance is as sure as the dawn.  
He will come to us like the rain,  
like the spring showers that water the land.

God's Words:

<sup>4</sup> What am I going to do with you, Ephraim?  
What am I going to do with you, Judah?  
Your loyalty is like the morning mist  
and like the early dew that vanishes.  
<sup>5</sup> This is why I have used the prophets  
to cut them down;  
I have killed them with the words of My mouth.  
My judgment strikes like lightning.  
<sup>6</sup> For I desire loyalty and not sacrifice,  
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

God, then and now, knows our hearts. Jesus was quoting the prophet, Isaiah, when He said,  
"These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." (Matthew 15:8)

And yet, God's grace is still great. Going back to Psalm 78:38-39, we read...

<sup>38</sup> Yet He was compassionate;  
He atoned for their guilt  
and did not destroy them.  
He often turned His anger aside  
and did not unleash all His wrath.  
<sup>39</sup> He remembered that they were only flesh,  
a wind that passes and does not return.

**3. They failed to remove sin.**

Look at Psalm 78:56-58.

But they rebelliously tested the Most High God,  
for they did not keep His decrees.  
<sup>57</sup> They treacherously turned away like their fathers;

they became warped like a faulty bow.

<sup>58</sup> They enraged Him with their high places  
and provoked His jealousy with their carved images.

This points to the third major historical illustration—Israel’s behavior as they began to enter the Promised Land. God told them to remove the gods—the altars of the false gods. Israel allowed many of those places to remain.

When we allow sin to hang around in our lives, thinking we can overcome, we always live to regret not totally ridding ourselves of all temptation.

### **So What? How do we stop the cycle of rebellion?**

The Psalmist, as did the Prophets, concluded the pathetic picture of continued rebellion by looking ahead—way ahead—to David, but more importantly to the ONE who would come through David’s line.

Then the Lord awoke as if from sleep,  
like a warrior from the effects of wine.

<sup>66</sup> He beat back His foes;

He gave them lasting shame.

<sup>67</sup> He rejected the tent of Joseph  
and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim.

<sup>68</sup> He chose instead the tribe of Judah,  
Mount Zion, which He loved.

<sup>69</sup> He built His sanctuary like the heights,  
like the earth that He established forever.

<sup>70</sup> He chose David His servant  
and took him from the sheepfolds;

<sup>71</sup> He brought him from tending ewes  
to be shepherd over His people Jacob—  
over Israel, His inheritance.

<sup>72</sup> He shepherded them with a pure heart  
and guided them with his skillful hands.

This continued rebellion would culminate in Jesus. But, our rebellion will continue unless we learn the principle of Psalm 78, so we go back to the beginning. How do we stop the cycle of rebellion?

### **Preach and Practice the Gospel!**

We must sing the Gospel. We must preach the Gospel. That is we must tell the story. We must tell the what of the Gospel, and we must tell the why of the Gospel.

We must tell the next generation that Jesus came, sinless, Son of God. He was not the biological offspring of God—He was God, but at the same time He was also the Son of Man. He was God so He was sinless. He was man so He could take upon Himself our sin. As He died, a miracle occurred. He took upon Himself our sin so that we might have forgiveness and freedom and live forever if we believe by faith.

The cyber security firm Check Point has detected a "severe infection" on thirty-eight Android smartphones and tablets. The malware was pre-installed on the devices. One phone was pre-loaded with ransomware, software that allows hackers to lock a user out of his or her devices and restore

proper functionality in exchange for money. The devices were corrupted before their users began using them. (Jim Denison, Pastor's Report, March 15, 2017)

That serves as a parable for us. We need a Saviour. It just won't do for us to try harder. We need a Saviour—ONE who is Saviour even through our constant rebellion.