

Heritage Part 3

Our message today will be the third in this series from the Book of Luke chapter 3, in which we have been considering some of the men who were born into the direct foregoing lineage of the Lord Jesus. And as we have done in those previous messages, we will again ask ourselves the question, “do the actions and the behaviors of one generation of people influence and impact the lives and the behaviors of the next generation, and even to ongoing future generations.

But before the message, I'd like for us to pause and consider this question for our own lives. Think back for a moment about your grandfather and your grandmother, and then also, about your father and your mother, and consider if you believe that some of their personality traits and types have been passed along to you and to your brothers and sisters. And consider especially, if that which has been passed on to you has impacted you in some ways, positively or negatively.

And then also, as you consider your own children and grandchildren and even your great-grandchildren, have you passed some of your personality traits and types on to them. And consider if you believe that your personality traits and habits and behaviors have impacted them in some ways, either positively or negatively.

And again, the overall question under consideration is, “do the actions and the behaviors of one generation of people influence and impact the lives and the behaviors of the next generation, and even to ongoing future generations.

And if that be so, then to what extent does that impact and that influence take place? Do we just pass along physical characteristics, health anomalies and maladies? Or do we also pass along personality traits, and perhaps even some sinful behavioral patterns?

How much do we, by our beliefs and behaviors today, influence, even write an indelible mark upon the DNA strands that we pass along to the children of the next generation?

In our earlier messages, we observed how God reached His Mighty Hand into the lives of many of these forefathers of the Lord Jesus and brought into fruition plans that He had made long even before time began, guiding and directing the steps and the behaviors of so many of them. And today, I would like for us to look carefully at the way that God is also doing that with you and me,

reaching His mighty Hand into our lives and bringing about the plans that He has for each one of us.

With that to consider, please turn again and follow along with me in the Book of Luke, chapter 3, beginning in verse 23 . . .

²³ Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli, ²⁴ the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Janna, the son of Joseph, ²⁵ the son of Mattathiah, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, ²⁶ the son of Maath, the son of Mattathiah, the son of Semei, the son of Joseph, the son of Judah, ²⁷ the son of Joannas, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, ²⁸ the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmodam, the son of Er, ²⁹ the son of Jose, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, ³⁰ the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonan, the son of Eliakim, ³¹ the son of Melea, the son of Menan, the son of Mattathah, the son of Nathan, the son of David, ³² the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, ³³ the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, ³⁴ the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, ³⁵ the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, ³⁶ the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, ³⁷ the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Cainan, ³⁸ the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. (Luke 3:23-38)

Here again, as we consider these men who were a part of the generational bloodline and heritage of the Lord Jesus, and as we look closely at some of the events of their lives, we find that while many of these men showed Godly character, in times of temptation and pressure, even the strongest of them stumbled, even the greatest of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, and others. But thankfully, though each of these men faltered, God ever and always remained intimately involved with them and was faithful to uphold them during their times of struggle.

Folks, may I continue to remind us, as I have said so often in the past, God is not, as some church doctrines would insist, a passive observer, a god who waits and watches the behavior and conduct of men, allowing all the many things to take place in their lives, just hoping that those things might, at some point, provide an opportunity for Him to respond to their needs and then somehow work out His plans and purposes.

Not at all! Not at all! Recall again the words of Jeremiah 29:11, and so many other scriptures like them. There God tells us,

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Folks, these words are so plain, and they are easy for us to understand. God is not passive. He surely does make plans, plans that He will certainly carry out to completion. And He has a plan for each one of us, for you and for me, plans that He made long even before time began. And as I mentioned a moment ago, contrary to many of the strongly held doctrines within our churches today, it is simply too haphazard an enterprise for God to hold back His Hand and leave the carrying out of His plans solely within the sinful daily uncertain behaviors and "free will" of men.

Those doctrines seem to me to insist that God is just sitting out there in the heavens, passively "allowing" random events to take place within people's lives, then waiting and watching and hoping that we will utter some "free-will" cry for help so that He can then save us from our sins. Folks, I have to confess to you that such understanding of who God is just does not make sense to me.

My understanding of the way that God carries out His plans is that instead of just "allowing" things to take place in our lives that will guide us to Christ is that He Himself actually takes a very active role in carrying forward all of His plans, inserting His mighty hand into our daily lives, leading, guiding and directing our paths. Recall the words of Jesus in John 6:44 where He said, "No one comes to Me except My Father draw them"

So, when we hear ourselves and others speak about God "allowing" things to take place in our lives, yes, there is a sense in which He does that. But He is so much more involved than we might think, even to being the One who initiates and directs those things as they take place, yes, the happy things, but also the

sad things. And yes, even many of the afflictions that we suffer, but then also He gives the healing and the relief that we receive from those sufferings, all things.

Why is that so? It is because God truly does love us. And His love is so deep and so demanding upon His own Holy character that He cannot do otherwise. He must be involved. Listen to these assuring words! First from, Proverbs 16:1

¹The preparations of the heart *belong* to man, But the answer of the tongue *is* from the Lord. (Proverbs 16:1)

And, then from verse 9 of Proverbs 16,

⁹A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

And then, one of my favorite promises within these scriptures, Proverbs 3:5-6.

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Dear friends, may I say again that God is not passive. He is intimately involved within all the moments of our daily lives, guiding and directing our paths!

But a question has to be asked. "What does God do about our personal responses and behaviors within those matters of our daily lives, especially when our actions and responses do not follow along with His plan? Does God simply ignore the things we do in order to accomplish His plans?"

We know that the answer to that question is no! God is wise and knowledgeable beyond measure. And this is where God's "allowing" of our behaviors takes place. Yes, He "allows" us to do our own will, and then He also "allows" the natural consequences and accountability that follow along with our actions. But please understand that within His "allowance", God is still directing all that takes place. It is a mysterious form of "concurrence", His will and our will somehow "flowing into one". And praise be to God for that!

That is a form of influence and control that we can't comprehend. And our hearts often question, "If God allows, but yet controls, how does it all take place?" And if He is truly always in control, how can we be held accountable for our behaviors?

And even further, if in the midst of it all, we develop personalities and habits and beliefs and philosophies that carry forward into the next generation, does God

hold that next generation accountable for that which they have received from us, simply because they have our DNA strands coursing through their veins?

I confess to you that I have only a pittance of understanding about how God manages all of these things as they take place. But I do know that it is part of His Holy character to only place accountability where it belongs.

One of the incomprehensible mysteries of the omnipotence and the omniscience of our Almighty God is that He is able to allow all of the things that we have mentioned to take place, all at the same time, but yet, without difficulty also able to “sort out” the ones who should be held accountable for each behavior. Again, it is that mysterious form of “concurrence” taking place, His will and our will somehow “flowing into one”.

But let me try to put it into a perspective that I can better comprehend! For clarity, the question that we have been asking is this, “Does heritage, those things that follow along through our bloodlines from earlier generations, have any bearing upon the things that are taking place in our lives right now? And if it does, what are we to do about it?”

The secular world has been asking the very same question for many, many years. I can recall it being talked about even when I was in high school, some sixty years ago. The question, “Are we a product of our heritage, or the product of our environment?”

Even in those days, I can recall my teachers saying that the experts tell us that we inherit about 35% of our behavior and we learn about 65% of it. They, of course, did not truly know, but, as experts do, they gave their best opinion anyway.

But as Christians, when we consider these words that we read in these scriptures about behaviors being passed along from generation to generation, we are asking that same question, “Does heritage, those things that follow along through our bloodlines from earlier generations have any bearing upon what takes place in our lives today?”

And again, part of the answer to that question seems to be apparent, especially in physical matters, the medical profession insisting that if our mother had cancer, then we are also likely to be predisposed to cancer.

But the more important question that we are addressing here today is, “does our DNA carry more within its strands than just health related issues?” “Can matters

of good and evil also travel along within those DNA strands?" "Can, will, does God bring consequences to bear upon future generations of children for the things done by their fathers and grandfathers, whether those things be good or evil?"

We considered the answers to these questions in our message last week, but I would like for us to repeat some of the things we came to understand. First and foremost, the answers to such questions must always begin and end within these scriptures. And God has given us a clear word about that matter, beginning with the Ten Commandments, where we read these words,

For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:5-6)

And as we said last week, these words are clear, but they are still difficult for some to understand and accept, especially in light of other words like those found in Ezekiel chapter 18, where we are told that God will not hold children accountable for the sins of their fathers. Listen to those words again!

²⁰ The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. (Ezekiel 18:20)

Some would say that those scriptures conflict with each other, but they do not! It really is as simple as it seems. God has allowed certain predispositions to be present within our lives, our bodies and our personalities. But just because those predispositions are present within us does not mean that we have to act upon them.

Let me say that again! Just because those predispositions are present within us does not mean that we have to act upon them.

The simplest understanding of this point is the fact that we are born with a full-blown sin nature, a predisposition to sin. And yes, too often, we do give into that sin nature, and we sin. But through the miracle of salvation, our sin nature is defeated and rendered powerless to "cause" us to sin. That's the difference spoken about here in these words of the Ten Commandments.

For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, But listen to these next words . . . ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:5-6)

Let me say this again. Yes, just as our DNA holds us hostage to our parent's diseases and passes them along to us for us to suffer from them, so too does the sin nature that comes to us from our parents at birth. We are predisposed to sin just as we are predisposed to the cancer that our parents had, and even more so.

But relief from our sin nature is simple and sure. Relief is found in salvation and the sanctifying that comes through living with Christ. That assurance again in those words of the Ten Commandments.

⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:6)

Dear friends, Christ is our rescuer. He wipes away all sin, all iniquity, and He sets us free from both the causes of sin and the penalties due those sins. Those assurances in John chapter 8 . . .

“When the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36)

But folks, we must also remember that this question about heritage should not just be about the bad side of life. Thankfully, it is also about good predispositions, Godly heritage? The answer to that question is that the same rule applies! And the scriptures are filled with that promise, including this verse in Exodus.

⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:6)

May I share one personal witness of this promise that I have observed, and then we will close for today.

Some years ago, in the wedding ceremony of Culley Newman, the son of one of my beloved co-workers at French Camp, Ralph Newman, Bruce Hosket, Ralph's son-in-law gave Culley a challenge. That challenge was founded upon the heritage that Culley was born into.

Bruce reminded Culley that God had put a long line of Godly heritage within Culley's soul, especially coming from his grandfather, Dr. Paul Culley, a medical missionary who had given his entire life in surrendered service to Christ. And then also, that same Godly heritage followed on along through Culley's mother, Margie Newman and His father, Ralph Newman, and on along to him.

In the challenge, Bruce reminded Culley that God had put that strong line of Godly heritage within the DNA strands of Culley's life, and that Culley had a responsibility to carry that Godly line on into the next generation, his children. And folks, I can easily see that precious Godly heritage now manifesting itself all throughout the Newman family line, the children and the grandchildren. Praise be to God!

So then, what is the conclusion that we should draw from this question, "Do the things done in one generation impact and influence future generations or does each person simply stand alone on their own, "an island unto themselves?" Again, God's word is absolute,

So then, yes, we do receive many things from an earlier generation, and we do pass along some of our nature to the next generation. But thanks be to God, there is a remedy for the bad things and a promise for the good things. Our remedy is "faith in Christ". The salvation and sanctification that comes from and through Christ will wipe away all of the negative and destructive predispositions that are born into us and will give us a Godly heritage to pass along to our children, and yes even to our children's children.

Listen to these words in Acts 2 as we close.

³⁹For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:39)

May we pray!