



**Christ Reformed**  
Community Church

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“A Charge to the Church in the U.S.A.”  
Psalm 78:1–72

Psalm 78, beginning in verse 1:

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!  
I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our fathers have told us.  
We will not hide them from their children,  
but tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.*

*He established a testimony in Jacob  
and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded our fathers  
to teach to their children,  
that the next generation might know them,  
the children yet unborn,  
and arise and tell them to their children,  
so that they should set their hope in God  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments;  
and that they should not be like their fathers,  
a stubborn and rebellious generation,  
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,  
whose spirit was not faithful to God.*

*The Ephraimites, armed with the bow,  
turned back on the day of battle.  
They did not keep God’s covenant,  
but refused to walk according to his law.  
They forgot his works  
and the wonders that he had shown them.*

*In the sight of their fathers he performed wonders  
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.  
He divided the sea and let them pass through it,  
and made the waters stand like a heap.  
In the daytime he led them with a cloud,  
and all the night with a fiery light.  
He split rocks in the wilderness  
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.  
He made streams come out of the rock  
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.*

*Yet they sinned still more against him,  
rebellling against the Most High in the desert.  
They tested God in their heart  
by demanding the food they craved.  
They spoke against God, saying,  
“Can God spread a table in the wilderness?  
He struck the rock so that water gushed out  
and streams overflowed.  
Can he also give bread  
or provide meat for his people?”*

*Therefore, when the Lord heard, he was full of wrath;  
a fire was kindled against Jacob;  
his anger rose against Israel,  
because they did not believe in God  
and did not trust his saving power.  
Yet he commanded the skies above  
and opened the doors of heaven,  
and he rained down on them manna to eat  
and gave them the grain of heaven.  
Man ate of the bread of the angels;  
he sent them food in abundance.  
He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens,  
and by his power he led out the south wind;  
he rained meat on them like dust,  
winged birds like the sand of the seas;  
he let them fall in the midst of their camp,  
all around their dwellings.  
And they ate and were well filled,  
for he gave them what they craved.  
But before they had satisfied their craving,  
while the food was still in their mouths,  
the anger of God rose against them,  
and he killed the strongest of them  
and laid low the young men of Israel.*

*In spite of all this, they still sinned;  
despite his wonders, they did not believe.  
So he made their days vanish like a breath,  
and their years in terror.  
When he killed them, they sought him;  
they repented and sought God earnestly.  
They remembered that God was their rock,  
the Most High God their redeemer.  
But they flattered him with their mouths;  
they lied to him with their tongues.  
Their heart was not steadfast toward him;  
they were not faithful to his covenant.  
Yet he, being compassionate,  
atoned for their iniquity  
and did not destroy them;  
he restrained his anger often  
and did not stir up all his wrath.  
He remembered that they were but flesh,  
a wind that passes and comes not again.  
How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness  
and grieved him in the desert!  
They tested God again and again  
and provoked the Holy One of Israel.  
They did not remember his power  
or the day when he redeemed them from the foe,  
when he performed his signs in Egypt  
and his marvels in the fields of Zoan.  
He turned their rivers to blood,  
so that they could not drink of their streams.  
He sent among them swarms of flies, which devoured them,  
and frogs, which destroyed them.  
He gave their crops to the destroying locust  
and the fruit of their labor to the locust.  
He destroyed their vines with hail  
and their sycamores with frost.  
He gave over their cattle to the hail  
and their flocks to thunderbolts.  
He let loose on them his burning anger,  
wrath, indignation, and distress,  
a company of destroying angels.  
He made a path for his anger;  
he did not spare them from death,  
but gave their lives over to the plague.  
He struck down every firstborn in Egypt,  
the firstfruits of their strength in the tents of Ham.*

*Then he led out his people like sheep  
and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.  
He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid,  
but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.  
And he brought them to his holy land,  
to the mountain which his right hand had won.  
He drove out nations before them;  
he apportioned them for a possession  
and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.*

*Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God  
and did not keep his testimonies,  
but turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers;  
they twisted like a deceitful bow.  
For they provoked him to anger with their high places;  
they moved him to jealousy with their idols.  
When God heard, he was full of wrath,  
and he utterly rejected Israel.  
He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh,  
the tent where he dwelt among mankind,  
and delivered his power to captivity,  
his glory to the hand of the foe.  
He gave his people over to the sword  
and vented his wrath on his heritage.  
Fire devoured their young men,  
and their young women had no marriage song.  
Their priests fell by the sword,  
and their widows made no lamentation.  
Then the Lord awoke as from sleep,  
like a strong man shouting because of wine.  
And he put his adversaries to rout;  
he put them to everlasting shame.*

*He rejected the tent of Joseph;  
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,  
but he chose the tribe of Judah,  
Mount Zion, which he loves.  
He built his sanctuary like the high heavens,  
like the earth, which he has founded forever.  
He chose David his servant  
and took him from the sheepfolds;  
from following the nursing ewes he brought him  
to shepherd Jacob his people,  
Israel his inheritance.  
With upright heart he shepherded them  
and guided them with his skillful hand.*

Thus ends the reading of God’s authoritative Word, which is all-sufficient. Please be seated as we ask for God’s help.

Our Father, we confess to You that we are a people of unclean lips. We are a people full of iniquity. We need Your grace. We need Your mercy, and yet at the same time, You have redeemed Your people, the church. You have saved us out of the world. You have elected us before the foundation of the world to be salt and life, to be the preservative of a dark society. Lord, we pray that as we unpack Psalm 78 and see its practical application for the church in the United States today that You would give us grace to understand these truths. Grant us mercy where we fail to follow these truths. Most of all, we pray for revival and reformation in our land, that Your church may stand up for Your truth, for Your Word; that we may be bold representatives of Your kingdom. We pray and ask all of these things in the precious name of Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Well, as you can ascertain from just a reading of Psalm chapter 78, it is a very long psalm, seventy-two verses. It is categorized by most commentators as an historical psalm. There are other historical psalms like Psalm 105, Psalm 106, Psalm 107, Psalm 114, Psalm 135, and Psalm 136, but this is the longest of all the historical psalms. It was Cotton Mather, the Puritan minister in New England who said, and I quote: “History is the story of events with praise or blame. History is the story of events with praise or blame.” Psalm 78 is a didactic and instructive psalm divided into six stanzas, recounting to us really the whole history of Israel’s failures, what she was to be blamed for. Israel’s failures on the one hand, and God’s faithfulness on the other hand. It is a psalm of history. It is a psalm about the past and ordered for us to draw practical application for the present. We believe that God has one way of salvation. We believe that God has one people. Paul refers to the church in Galatians chapter 6 as the “Israel of God.” And so, what God says through the psalmist, through Asaph, who was the inspired writer, what God says through the psalmist has practical import for the church today. This psalm reveals the failures, therefore, not only of the nation of Israel but broadly speaking, the failures of God’s visible church throughout all history; that is, the church as we see it. And then how God preserves a remnant, or what we could call the invisible church, the church as God sees it; that God is establishing His kingdom in the world, that God is growing His kingdom in the world, and that God will rule and reign ultimately and finally. This is a psalm that recounts how God’s people responded wrongly in the past, and it is a call to action. It is a call for God’s people today to break the pattern of Israel, to break the pattern of the rebellious visible church, the outwardly professed people of God. It is a call for every new generation to repent from a pattern of rebellion and rejection, even from people that profess the name of God.

As you come this morning to the Word of God, I hope that you are not one of those people who view the past as the “good old days.” I hope you are not one of those people that think everything was okay in the 1950s, and then when the 1960s came, that was when everything sort of went South. To view the past as the good old days is not being honest with history. Reading Psalm 78 speaks about disgusting, rebellious, repugnant, abominable, idolatrous sin by the people of God. And yet it points at the end to the son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, to remind us that there is only optimism for the future, a bright future, a future yielded to the lordship of Jesus Christ, a future that has finally learned the hard lessons of the past. This psalm is really a window into the heart of God because it promises to bless His people in spite of their failures. It promises that God

will demonstrate mercy in spite of rebellion, that God will build His kingdom in spite of compromise, and yet at the same it's calling on all of God's people regardless of what nation they exist in to take a stand for God's kingdom and a stand for God's law. The church in the United States of America has been blessed. It has been blessed, and it has been used by God, but through its history, it has many failings. The generation of God's people today must learn from the past and through repentance, forge a new way forward, not primarily for the preservation of the United States of America merely but more importantly for the furtherance of God's kingdom. You know the quote well—we don't even know who originally said it, but someone once said, and many people have said it since—that “Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” That is the message of Psalm 78; that we are to be as speedy to repent as God is speedy to forgive, that Christians are to be salt and light, the preservatives of society.

Now, the psalm is divided, as I said, into six stanzas, giving a record essentially of God's people throughout history, and in these six stanzas, there are six warnings to the people of God. As we work through these 72 verses—you may be surprised how quickly we work through these 72 verses—we'll give sort of an exposition of these six stanzas found in Psalm 78. And then when we finish that, we'll come around at the end, and I want to give three points of application that apply specifically to the church in the United States of America. So, those of you that are students of the Puritans can identify very quickly that this is very much a Puritanical sermon outline. It's really nine points hidden by six but with three coming at the end. So, let's begin looking at these six stanzas.

As I said, it recounts God's people throughout history, telling us about God's people. What were they like? What marked their history? Well, number one, we see in verses 1 through 8 that it is a history of responsibility. It's a history of responsibility. The Spirit-inspired Asaph reminds God's people that we were taught, and therefore, we have a responsibility to teach others. Verse 1: *“Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!”* This is the psalmist teaching the church. This is the psalmist teaching the people of God, reminding us that He is teaching us, reminding us that we have been taught, number one, truths and parables. Verse 2: *“I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old.”* That is quoted by our Lord in Matthew chapter 13 to indicate the fact that Scripture is not always clear to everybody. Scripture is clearly understood in the sense that we believe in the perspicuity of Scripture. God speaks in a common way to common man in a way we can understand, but there are the deep things of God, the spiritual and theological things of God that only someone illuminated by the Holy Spirit can understand. But these truths and parables are made plain to true believers. Verse 3: *“Things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us.”* The psalmist gives to us and what he's telling us here in these opening verses is that he is going to give to us forgotten lessons from Israel's past experience, really looking beyond the events themselves to their deeper spiritual, theological, historical meaning for the people of God; truths that His people have been enlightened to, truths that His people, because they have been enlightened to, they've been given a great responsibility because they have been taught to teach others. And what are we to teach others?

Well, number one is living wonders. Verse 4: *“We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.”* It's a call by the psalmist for the godly in every age reminding them that they have a sacred responsibility to transmit the glorious deeds of the Lord, His might, His wonders that He

has done to our posterity, to succeeding generations. The living wonders of God are not to remain hidden; that is, if we want to avoid the sins of the past, that we are to uphold the living wonders of God. What is that? The works of His saving deliverance, His redemption. Those are to be transmitted from age to age, proclaimed without interruption from a father to his children in each family until it reaches the last family of the earth. We have been taught; we are to teach others these living wonders. And not only that, number two, not only His living wonders but His Law-Word. Verse 5: *“He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children.”* The testimony that was established in Jacob is a synonym with the Law that was appointed in Israel, which is also synonymous with verse 7, the keeping of His commandments.

This is speaking about God’s Law-Word; that God’s Law-Word is to be passed down from one generation to the next in order that God’s people may understand their duty and their allegiance to God. Because He has redeemed His people, true obedience is the mark of steadfast allegiance to God. Verse 6: *“That the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children.”* To entrust the Law-Word to the next generation is the responsibility of the church, 1 Timothy 3:15, *“the pillar and the ground of the truth,”* that through the ministers of the Word of God, the truth of God is to be upheld to allow for a continual succession of truth so that sin is exposed through the Law of God, sin is confessed, and people are saved. Romans 7:7: *“If it had not been for the law,”* Paul says, *“I would not have known sin.”* This is the transmission, the succession of God’s Law-Word by the people of God to their children. In fact, God has designed it this way. We obviously see that abortion is reprehensible in God’s eyes because it is murder. But it is not just the murder of life; it is in a sense a murder of the gospel itself because God has designed the world in such a way that Christian parents pass the gospel to their children by passing down the Law of God, so their sin is exposed. And how can, as verse 6 says, *“children yet unborn,”* who are never born but who are murdered, have the gospel passed down? This is central to God’s promises to Abraham in Genesis 18:19: *“For I have chosen him [Abraham], that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”* This is the responsibility of God’s people throughout history to uphold the Law of God, to uphold the standards of God. That is not the responsibility that God gives unbelievers. That is a responsibility God gives the church, the visible people of God, Isaiah 59:21:

*“And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,” says the LORD, “from this time forth and forevermore.”*

And verse 7 says, why: *“So that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.”* So, they should set their hope in God that they wouldn’t forget His living wonders; that is, the works of God, His salvation, and that they would do His Law, keep His commandments. The true hope in God brings with it faith and obedience, trust in God’s gracious living wonders of redemption culminating in our Redeemer, and trust in His commandments out of gratitude and reverence and honor and worship of God. That is true hope in God. And then verse 8: *“And that they should not be like their fathers.”* Here’s the point of the whole psalm: *“A stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was*

*not faithful to God.”* That was the history of Israel; given great responsibility with the Law of God and the covenants of God. They were stewards, and they failed the test. In fact, Paul says that, right? In Romans 15:4: *“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”* We might have a greater hope through the poor example, Paul would say to the Corinthians, of the Israelites. The psalmist is saying that the story of the visible church is a story and a history of responsibility. It is full of tough lessons, a hard road, a chain of unbroken failure because he moves from telling us that the story of the visible church is a history of responsibility, number one; secondly, to a history of rebellion, verses 9 through 16.

Their history proved time and time again, the history of Israel, that though they wouldn't fight for God, He would fight for them. Though they were rebellious, God continually preserved them. Verses 9 through 11, they didn't fight for him. They forsook His Law-Word, the very thing they were supposed to transmit. Verse 9: *“The Ephraimites, armed with the bow, turned back on the day of battle. They did not keep God's covenant, but refused to walk according to his law.”* The psalmist is using one tribe, Ephraim, because this was a warlike tribe. It was known for its warriors, people like the likes of Joshua, a great soldier of God. This particular tribe represents all of Israel who turn back on the day of battle. This is undoubtedly a reference to the embarrassing defeat to the Philistines during Eli's day when the ark was stolen. Later on in this psalm in verse 60, the psalmist returns to that incident, but we read in 1 Samuel 4: *“So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.”* They literally failed to fight to keep God's Law. Did you get that? They lost the stone tablets in the ark of God, their greatest weapon against the enemy, the thing that gave them their greatest responsibility in the world. They literally forsook it, and I believe the psalmist here is not only speaking literally about what they did but figuratively, this marked their history. They were spiritual retreatists. They did not stand for God's Law. They forsook God's Law-Word, refusing to allow it to be the final say and rule over them, Ephraim being a symbol of national apostasy.

So, we read in verse 10: *“They did not keep God's covenant.”* They *“refused to walk according to his law.”* They broke covenant with God. They stopped fighting for God. They forsook His Law-Word, and they forgot His living works. Verse 11: *“They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them.”* That's why they broke covenant. If they would have remembered God's faithfulness to protect them from their enemies, they wouldn't have cowered in fear. They would have conquered in fighting, but instead they compromised God's Law. Yea, they lost God's stone tablets, which figuratively tells us what was happening to them as a nation. As the people of God, they weren't standing on the Law of God. They were like all the other nations around them. They wanted to be like all the other nations around them in their theology and in the way that they lived. They didn't fight for God. They rebelled against God, and yet the psalmist says that God fought for them in verses 12 through 16. First of all, He fought for them because He performed wonders. Verse 12: *“In the sight of their fathers he performed wonders in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.”* He not only performed wonders, but He parted the waters. Verse 13: *“He divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap.”* He performed wonders. He parted the waters. He prepared their way. Verse 14: *“In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a fiery light.”* He performed wonders and parted the waters and prepared their



way, and He pounded the wilderness rock so they received water. Verse 15: *“He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock and caused waters to flow down like rivers.”* In spite of their history of rebellion, God used them. This is the history of God’s visible church. It’s a history of responsibility. It’s a history of rebellion.

Number three, it’s a history of rejection, verses 17 through 31. Their rebellion turned into outright rejection, seen in their doubting of God and then God disciplining them. Notice first, they doubted God by testing Him with their hearts. Verse 17: *“Yet they sinned still more against him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert. They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved.”* They tested Him with their hearts. Then they tested Him with their mouths, verse 19: *“They spoke against God, saying, ‘Can God spread a table in the wilderness? He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed. Can he also give bread or provide meat for his people?’”* They demanded the food that they wanted, that they used to have, and at the same time, they doubted the reality of God’s ability to provide food, spurning God, blaspheming God. They doubted Him, and so He disciplined them. Notice the discipline spoken in verse 21: *“Therefore, when the Lord heard, he was full of wrath; a fire was kindled against Jacob; his anger rose against Israel,”* verse 22, *“because they did not believe in God and did not trust his saving power.”* This was an issue of doubt in God’s saving ability. That’s His discipline spoken. Now, His discipline seen.

First of all, He opened the bars of heaven. Verse 23: *“Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven.”* He then sent the bread of heaven. *“He rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance. He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens, and by his power he led out the south wind.”* He released the birds of heaven. *“He rained meat on them like dust,”* verse 27, *“winged birds like the sand of the seas; he let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings.”* We say, well, this is a demonstration of God’s grace. Yes, it was, but it was also a demonstration of His wrath because verse 29 says, *“And they ate and were well filled, for he gave them what they craved.”* He gave them exactly what they wanted in all of their ingratitude. *“But before they had satisfied their craving,”* verse 30, *“while the food was still in their mouths, the anger of God rose against them, and he killed the strongest of them and laid low the young men of Israel.”* He satisfied their craving for sin with death. That’s true of any society that God has given up in judgment. You want to know whether or not a society, a culture, or a nation is under God’s judgment? There’s a lack of young men who know how to be men. Verse 31: *“The anger of God rose against them, and he killed the strongest of them and laid low the young men of Israel.”*

When women take over leadership in the church, when women take over leadership in the government, that is a sign of God’s judgment. God kills all the strong men. There are no young men left. The only men left are old men because of Israel’s rebellion and ultimate rejection. And here’s where we need to pay attention because when judgment comes this harsh upon any people, it will produce a sense of false repentance, and that’s what happened to Israel. This is what marked her history. This is what marks the history of God’s visible church. It’s a history marked with responsibility, rebellion, rejection but also repentance, and I’m talking about the false kind. They continued to be faithless to the covenant. Notice, they were faithless to the covenant with their mind, verse 32: *“In spite of all this, they still sinned; despite his wonders, they did not believe. So*

*he made their days vanish like a breath, and their years in terror. When he killed them, they sought him; they repented and sought God earnestly.”* But notice verse 35, not to repentance: *“They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer. But they flattered him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues.”* They were faithless with a dishonest mind. *“Yeah, we remember God. We remember that He delivered us.”* They were faithless with a dishonest mouth because they lied about their repentance. They were faithless with a dishonest heart. Verse 37: *“Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant.”* Their heart was not in the confession they made with their lips.

This was worldly sorrow. They remembered that God was their Rock, their Redeemer, but they faked the repentance. They lied with their tongues due to inward decay and rot. Their heart was not steadfast toward Him. They were not faithful to the covenant. This was not real repentance. Their shame was a sham. They turned to God outwardly to save face, but inwardly, they had turned their back to God. They were living a lie. This was horrible hypocrisy, deliberate deception. They were lamenting the consequences for their sin without lamenting the sin itself. And when others were dying around them, they promised God they would live without sin, and that living without sin didn’t last long—feigned repentance. And yet again, though they were faithless to the covenant, God was faithful to the covenant. He restrained His punishment, verse 38: *“Yet he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath.”* God could always pour out more wrath. God was faithful to the covenant, restraining His punishment, and remembering His people. Verse 39: *“He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again.”*

This is the history of God’s people. A history of responsibility, a history of rebellion, a history of rejection, a history of false repentance, and yet also, number five, a history of redemption, verses 40 through 50, recalling once again the events of the Exodus. The psalmist here highlights God’s merciful redemption in spite of Israel’s rebellion. They had a history of rebellion, but God had a history of redemption. At first, the psalmist gives a history of the rebellion recapped. He says in verse 40, they turned from God: *“How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert!”* They turned against God. They tested God, verse 41: *“They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel.”* This is the history of their rebellion recapped, over and over again, generation after generation, event after event, family after family. Now, God’s history of redemption recapped. God powerfully demonstrated the signs in redeeming them. Verse 43:

*When he performed his signs in Egypt and his marvels in the fields of Zoan. He turned their rivers to blood—these are the plagues—so that they could not drink of their streams. He sent among them swarms of flies, which devoured them, and frogs, which destroyed them. He gave their crops to the destroying locust and the fruit of their labor to the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamores with frost. He gave over their cattle to the hail and their flocks to thunderbolts. He let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels.*

This is what God did for Israel to deliver her. Verse 50: *“He made a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death, but gave their lives over to the plague. He struck down every firstborn in Egypt, the firstfruits of their strength in the tents of Ham.”* God redeemed Israel. He powerfully

demonstrated the signs. He powerfully then delivered those sheep, verse 52: *“Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid, but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And he brought them to his holy land, to the mountain which his right hand had won.”* In spite of their rebellion, God redeemed a remnant, didn’t He? Powerfully demonstrating the signs, powerfully delivering the sheep, and powerfully driving out the nations. Verse 55: *“He drove out nations before them; he apportioned them for a possession and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.”* This is the history of God’s people. The visible church is a mixed bag of goats and sheep. Do you have any doubt about that now this morning? Psalm 78 is abundantly clear, there are believers and unbelievers in the church. There are those saved and unsaved. There is no such thing as a 100 percent regenerate church unless you’re in heaven. Throughout history, the challenge of God’s remnant has been not only to fight the world with the one hand but to fight the visible church with the other hand, to fight unorthodoxy, to fight sin, to fight immorality. Why was God redeeming His people, Israel, in spite of their mass rebellion? Well, it’s because He had a remnant He was saving.

The story of God’s people has a long history: a history of responsibility, a history of rebellion and rejection, and repentance—the false kind—a history of redemption, and ultimately, a history of replacement. There came a day when God had enough, verses 56 through 72. Their new environment, the Promised Land that we just read about, He drove out the nations. He settled the tribes in their tents. It didn’t change their hearts because the problem of the human heart is a problem of sin. The problem of mankind is spiritual corruption, not physical location. It is not our environment that makes us the way that we are. It is that we have inherited a sin nature. And they continually ran from God, even after entering the Promised Land, until God finally rejected them as a whole. Notice, they ran from God. They ran from Him by testing Him, verse 56: *“Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God and did not keep his testimonies.”* They tested Him, and they turned their back on Him. Verse 57: *“But turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers; they twisted like a deceitful bow.”* They tested Him. They turned their back on God, and they targeted Him, verse 58. They provoked Him. *“For they provoked him to anger with their high places; they moved him to jealousy with their idols.”* They believed in replacement theology. They replaced God with their false idols, and what does God do? They are running from Him, so He keeps His promises to Abraham, but He rejects the nation of Israel as a whole. How does He do it? First of all, by abandoning them. Verse 59: *“When God heard, he was full of wrath, and he utterly rejected Israel.”* And what did He do?

*He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mankind, and delivered his power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe. He gave his people over to the sword and vented his wrath on his heritage. Fire devoured their young men, and their young women had no marriage song. Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation.*

This is referring again to 1 Samuel 4. God’s people fell in battle. Hophni and Phinehas, the priests, literally fell by the sword. The ark of God was taken. It was removed from Shiloh. The corruption of God’s worship, which marked Israel, is a sin crying for God’s judgment. Idolatry, false worship, His Word not faithfully preached, His sacraments turning to superstition, reverence and true repentance removed from the sanctuary of God, so God removes Himself from the sanctuary. God removed Himself from dwelling in Shiloh. As a matter of fact, when God allows His enemies to get the upper hand on His visible people by removing His glory and His presence, it is a

demonstration of God’s greater anger against the visible church than His full-front enemies, and that’s what happened to Israel. As one Reformed commentator says, “It is amongst the most fearful tokens of God’s displeasures against a land or a people or a nation when He removes His ministers from them.” What does verse 64 say? *“Their priests fell by the sword.”* And it was so bad *“Their widows made no lamentation.”* The removal of ministers from office due to sin is a demonstration of God’s judgment on a nation. How many ministers, how many clergymen have fallen from their high office just in the last two years? What is that? People ask me all the time, “What is going on? What is wrong with people entering the ministry?” This is the judgment of God. This is what God did to Israel. He killed the priests. He abandoned His people. He slew the priests, and yet all was not lost because God rejected them by abandoning them, but then He acted for them.

Remember, God had made a promise to Abraham, and so what does God do? He elects a specific tribe, verse 65: *“Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, like a strong man shouting because of wine.”* This is illustrative of what it was like. God doesn’t actually sleep, but what was God doing throughout all the history of Israel? How could God be just and allow all the sin and this rebellion from the people of God? It’s as if God awoke from His sleep and now we know what He was up to. What was God doing? Verse 66: *“And he put his adversaries to rout; he put them to everlasting shame.”* How did he do it? Verse 67: *“He rejected the tent of Joseph; he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim.”* Remember, Ephraim were those warriors who backed down on the day of battle, not willing to fight for the Law of God. Verse 68, instead *“he chose the tribe of Judah.”* Does that sound familiar? *“Mount Zion, which he loves.”* God did not return the ark to Shiloh. God built His temple, as we are going to see in verse 69. We’ll just look at it: *“He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever.”* He built the temple in Jerusalem where His glory dwelled. God did not forsake His people altogether. He spared them through a remnant, through almost a “second election,” as John Calvin calls it in his commentary on Psalm 78, by choosing the tribe of Judah from which the Christ child would arise in the flesh. Thus, God will not depart from Israel, and yet He will not be found, save in the tribe of Judah, out of which came Christ, the root and fountain of mercy for Israel, for God’s people, for all time.

God elects a tribe, and God establishes a kingdom. We already saw it, verse 69: *“He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever.”* The New Testament teaches that the temple was a type foreshadowing the kingdom of God whose foundations cannot be shaken, whose maker and builder is God, that God’s church, God’s kingdom will last forever. And we read about that—didn’t we?—from Hebrews chapter 12. I’ll just remind you of a couple of verses: *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.”* The author of Hebrews says, *“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”*

What was God doing? Well, He elected a tribe, He established a kingdom, and He enthroned a king. Verse 70: *“He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.”* This is speaking about David but obviously pointing forward to Christ. David was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ took on the human nature from the lineage of David. And just as David came from the lowly sheepfolds and became the great shepherd of God’s flocks, the point here and the psalmist—this is pointing

forward—is that so too did Jesus come from a lowly estate, humbling Himself to the point of death, coming from Bethlehem, from the tribe finally to shepherd His people. And how does Jesus shepherd it? He doesn't shepherd it like the gentiles. He doesn't lord it over. He doesn't shepherd people and lead people like onerous civil magistrates. No, it says, “[He] took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people.” And “with upright heart he shepherded them.” That is, with integrity. That is, with telling the truth. You can't tell the truth unless you speak the Word of God. You can't tell the truth unless you uphold the Law of God, “And [he] guided them with his skillful hand.” That was David, and it's pointing forward to Christ at His session right now where He is ruling and reigning, guiding “with his skillful hand.”

The heart of the problem of America is a problem of leadership. It's a problem that no one seems to have the skill anymore to lead, whether it's in the government or it's in the church. George Whitfield said one time:

As God can send a nation or people no greater blessing than to give them faithful, sincere and upright ministers, so the greatest curse that God can possibly send upon a people in this world is to give them over to blind, unregenerate, carnal, lukewarm and unskillful guides.

Such, I assume, he meant to be applied to any leader, whether in the church or the civic realm. Six stanzas of exposition, the history of Israel. That's really the history of the visible church, and what I want you to understand this morning is that that is really the history of the church in the United States; a history of rebellion, a history of compromise. The United States, let me be clear, is not Israel; and the United States, to be even clearer, is not the new Israel. Israel was uniquely and singularly chosen by God as a nation that God would bless through whom it would be the vehicle by which the Messiah would come, born from a Jewish womb, a virgin's womb at that. Having said that, the United States was founded on Christian principles by Christian men who followed God's Law-Word. That is really indisputable, and I don't even feel the need this morning to defend that assertion but just to make this point, that with great blessing comes great responsibility. It could be said that as the world leader in her short existence, the United States, comparatively speaking, with its vast resources and all that the church has done in establishing seminaries and building churches, sending missionaries abroad, it has been a history of rebellion, a history of corrupt clergy, a history of corrupt elders, a history of corrupt leaders. The point of Psalm 78 is repentance. Repentance must begin with the house of the Lord because judgment begins with the house of the Lord. That's the point of Psalm 78. It can be applied to any nation who has a Christian influence that is as great as the influence the church has had and Christianity has had in the West, and, in particular, in the United States of America.

So, there are three lessons from Psalm 78 that I think lead our nation on the road to repentance. It begins with the church. Repentance begins with the house of the Lord because judgment begins with the house of the Lord. Three points that lead to repentance. Number one, very simply, the church needs to remember God's Law, remembers God's Law. Isn't the psalmist clear here about the “*testimony in Jacob*” that was established, verse 5, the Law that was appointed in Israel that He commanded our fathers to teach our children to not forget the works of God, verse 7, “*but to keep his commandments*”? God's Law never changes. Nations come, nations go, nations rise, nations fall. Cultures come, cultures go, societies change, customs change. God's Law does not change, and the church today is conforming to the world, not to the Word. The warning of James

4:4: *“Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”* The visible church is making herself an enemy of God every time she doesn’t stand on the Law of God, the Ten Commandments, the moral precepts of God’s truth, the summary of all of divine Law. To be conformed to God’s Law is to be conformed to God Himself because He is immutable. He does not change. He is the one constant in an everchanging and rapidly so world. The church is called to pass down from generation to the next the testimony of Jacob, the Law of God, the commandments of God.

To put it to you very simply—this is so easy a child can understand it—what was wrong yesterday is still wrong today and will still be wrong tomorrow, and what was right yesterday is right today and will still be right tomorrow. God’s Law does not change. It is the unchanging standard. That really clears things up, doesn’t it, in a world full of androgyny, in a world full of gender confusion? I almost don’t want to say this, but I was reading an article last night, and it would not even use the language of male and female. Instead, it said “people with penises, people with vaginas.” Well, guess what? The only people with penises are males; the only people with vaginas are females, so just say that. Our culture can’t even make a distinction between a penis and a vagina because they have failed to remember God’s Law. There will be no national repentance without the church remembering God’s Law, number one.

Number two, there will be no repentance apart from the church remembering that disobedience to God’s Law by the church comes with great cost. Israel, as a nation, is the prototype of this principle. The death of our culture has been prompted by the culture of death. We celebrated last week the overturning of Roe, a wonderful, amazing blessing of God, especially since it occurred during pride month, but the church must be very careful. It is partly true that Roe was overturned because of the outcry of Christians against the slaughter of babies, but we need to be careful not to get ahead of ourselves. The overturning of Roe, no doubt, can be attributed to the incrementalists and the abolitionists, anyone who has stood up for life and stood against abortion, but the overturning of Roe had more to do with God’s divine mercy than it had to do with repentance. Did you hear any senators repent? Did you hear the president repent? And just over a week ago, it seemed that God had given over America until Roe was overturned, and now it seems like His mercy may be coming to take America back. Could be. Maybe not. Maybe He’s fully abandoned it.

The worst sin of our generation is the sin of abortion. It’s a call for national repentance at the grassroots level, pastors of small churches, big churches, seminary presidents, national Christian leaders of every stripe to repent. Repentance means revival. Repentance means turning from wickedness, continually speaking out against abortion, not taking the victory lap yet. Speaking against abortion but also speaking out against homosexuality, transgenderism, the myth of social justice, critical race theory, being clear that all governments are dutybound not to the legislation of their own imagination but to God’s Law-Word itself; otherwise, society will continue to be cursed by God. There must be repentance, remembering that abortion is wrong not fundamentally because everyone has a right to life. In fact, capital punishment, which is also in God’s Law, says that some people have a right to death. Exodus 21:12: *“Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.”* Abortion is wrong not merely because people have a right to life but because it is a clear violation of God’s Law: *“Thou shalt not murder.”* And, in particular, that murder is murdering someone created in the image of God. That is a human embryo or fetus. That is murder. In fact, you say, “Well, that’s sort of a loose argument to use the sixth commandment to say that

abortion is wrong.” Well, I don’t need the sixth commandment because I have the book of Exodus, and last time I checked that’s still in the Bible.

Turn to Exodus chapter 21. In Exodus chapter 21, there is a case law that describes very clearly the severity and unlawful nature of abortion. Verse 22: “*When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out,*” that is premature birth leading to premature death, “*but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman’s husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm,*” that is, death, “*then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.*” This case law isn’t even describing deliberate abortion, is it? It is saying that accidental abortion is unlawful when men strive together. What is that? Well, you’ve probably seen that sort of thing happen in your life. Two men get ready to get into a brawl and what happens? A lady steps in between them. And in this case, a pregnant woman steps in between and they bump her, causing her to abort the baby. The Bible says that accidental abortion should result in capital punishment, the death penalty.

You don’t need an argument from the sixth commandment when you have Exodus, although the sixth commandment applies. Abortion is clearly spoken about as unlawful, leading to death; and if accidental abortion is unlawful, then there doesn’t need to be a specific sin about deliberate abortion. The argument against abortion according to God’s Law moves from the lesser to the greater. If the lesser accidental abortion is unlawful, so is the greater, deliberate abortion, and that is still the culture that we are in today. The goal of overturning Roe is not merely to send the issue back to the states; it’s to send the issue back to the Sovereign. Sending the issue back to the states is constitutional. Sending the issue back to the states is biblical. It is not the right of the state to determine who can abort, when they can abort, how they can abort. That’s why we don’t take a victory lap. The state is not God. God is God, and we play by God’s rules.

In fact, I said earlier that there are those who like to live in the sentimental sort of realm that the 1950s were the perfect world. Let me tell you this; in the Greco-Roman world, abortion was illegal only if the state deemed it illegal, and it was legal only if the state deemed it legal. That sounds pretty much like our culture. In fact, if you read Plato’s *Republic*, it describes the state or the government as God. It says the state can order, *order*, abortion. The state can *order* infanticide. The state can *order* even incest in some cases because it was a shame for a father not to have children. So, if a father couldn’t have children by his wife, he went to someone else in his family to do it, and the state ordered him to do it for the sake of the state, for the sake of the republic. In fact, the early church argued against abortion, and their argument was always based upon the moral Law of God. The *Didache* or *Didache* says, “Thou shalt not slay the child by causing abortion, nor kill that which is begotten, for everything that is shaped has received the soul from God. If it be slain, it shall be avenged as being unjustly destroyed.” Tertullian—I love this quote: “To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to birth. That *is* a man which is *going to be* one; you have the fruit already in its seed.” In ancient times, abortion was wrong according to the law based on the father’s right to have offspring, at times when the government felt like it. But in modern times, abortion is deemed right based on the mother’s right to make her own choice, to be a law unto herself, and that did start in the 1960s from the vantage point of feminism, women’s rights, a position held even by the U.S. Public Health Association that a woman has the right to abortion.

You see, the issue here is not ultimately abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, homosexual unions. The issue goes all the way back to COVID. It goes back to the restrictions made by the CDC, restrictions made by a federal agency to try to govern and control your life with their own laws, with their own rules. That’s why the overturning of Roe is not a full victory because they’ve simply given the power out of the federal government’s hands into the government of the state. The government of the state has no right to define biblical marriage, to define when and how and if someone can have abortion. Only God has a right to do that. This, of course, is all rooted in humanistic philosophy. It’s all rooted in evolution and atheism because humanism reduces morality to man’s experience. Man decides what is right and what is wrong for him or for her based upon their experience; and if they had a very bad environment or they are seen as a victim, then their problems aren’t their fault and therefore they can correct their problems however they want to correct their problems, living any way they want to live. The great idol of the United States of America is pagan statism, obeying the government, what the government says a gender is, what the government says a marriage is, what the government says in how abortion can or cannot be done. The point of Psalm 78 is only God’s Law, only God’s Law-Word has the right to define life, and life is in a fetus according to the Old Testament, and biblical marriage is only between a male and a female.

We live in a highly homosexualized culture. The popular view of humanism says that homosexuality is a natural act, which is a phase in the erotic development of man. No, it’s unnatural, not natural. It’s not a phase in the erotic development of man; it’s an act against God’s natural order and against God’s Law. Leviticus 18:22: “*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.*” Leviticus 20:13: “*If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death.*” Homosexuality is the apex of idolatry, worshiping the “*creature rather than the creator,*” as Paul says in Romans 1. Turn over there with me for a moment because there it also mentions homosexuality. A society given over, a society abandoned by God, speaks about the fact that it will be homosexualized, verse 26:

*God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed [or who burned] with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

Very interesting, *ekkaiō* is the Greek word there for consumed or burned with passion. It literally means “to burn out,” as if to say that homosexuality is the burning out of man. Homosexuality is the burning down of a society. You’ve reached the apex, to put it in ironic terms, of the lowest point. That is the society we are in: homosexualism, transgenderism, transvestitism—all things trans. What does God’s Word say in Deuteronomy 22:5: “*A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD.*” That sort of rules out sex change operations because it’s even sinful to wear women’s clothing if you’re a man, or if you’re a woman to wear men’s clothing. It’s striking to me that in Deuteronomy 22:5, it uses the word *abomination*, and it says, “*whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD.*” The actual people are an abomination to the Lord. Four Hebrew words



to define that one Greek word. They all mean something like “disgusting, reprehensible, something that smells, something that is idolatrous, something that God abhors, something that God hates.”

Our culture has speedily moved from worshiping the idol of the lovely through plastic surgery in the 1980s and 1990s to the idol of the ugly, in sex change operations, what is an abomination to God. And what is the point of all this? The point of all of this is that pagan statism, the government telling us and redefining reality and redefining laws and rights is our greatest enemy. One-world statism. Globalism, which is an extension of Marxism. They want—listen to this—they want no distinction between the sexes because they want no distinction between the nations. They want a one-world order. They want to have a utopian goal of equality that has social justice where you can be whoever you want to be and live however you want to live, and you’re one with nature and we’re one with each other. Joe Boot writes about this in his book entitled *Ruler of the Kings*. He says, and I quote:

The *sine qua non* of all victimhood is the planet or universe itself, standing proxy for all oppressed groups everywhere. It is no longer the *bourgeoisie* oppressing the proletariat. Nature itself must be liberated in order for man to recreate himself. This liberation requires radical equalization in order to stop the white, Christian, capitalist plunderers. This schema alone will bring about social justice, and all who oppose this program are cast as the oppressors and the enemies of human liberation.

That is why there is such an attack on the church. Boot goes on to say:

Therefore, by eliminating distinctions in gender, economic prosperity, ethnicity, knowledge, health, moral values and more, all mankind will be humanized, equalized, socialized [you could say sexualized, also], united as one universal entity, and the unification of the godhead will have been achieved. At this dreamed-of historical moment, socialized humanity will finally be classless, stateless, family-less, genderless, lawless, religion-less, and an essentially structureless collectivity of beings in harmony with themselves and nature. The imagined equality here is both ontological in terms of our being, and [listen to this] political. This love and unity, the progressive accomplishment of total social justice, is thus the great imperative of the utopian. We see this particularly in the repressive tolerance agenda that has become the new orthodoxy throughout much of Western higher education. Those who oppose this “woke” vision, thereby hindering the realization of love and unity, are to be condemned as phobic, haters, heretics, disturbers of the peace, and purveyors of the new atheism; that is, a belief in the God of the Bible. That’s the new atheism. Such a view of reality based on a personal, relational God, who transcends time and creation, who differentiates judges, makes covenant, commands and calls to repentance cannot be tolerated as He destroys the unity of the new godhead. The heretics must be marginalized, silenced, imprisoned, or cast out. This absolute requirement for the unity or oneness of humanity as the essence of social justice or equity is the fundamental principle of the dystopian nightmare [Boot calls it].

That is where we are at today. We need to remember God’s Law. We need to remember that disobedience to God’s Law comes with great consequences to a society that does not uphold God’s Law. And third, we need to remember that allegiance to Christ’s kingship as rightful Lawgiver is more important than our allegiance to civil authorities. Did you notice in Psalm 78 that the goal was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, ruling over His kingdom? Nations come; nations go. The Bible says it’s better to obey God than to obey man. The church must show and tell Washington that Mount Zion, not Capitol Hill, has the right to define what is moral, has the right to define what is right and what is wrong. As Christians, we don’t follow the secular, paganistic

agenda of social justice, the Marxist-driven utopia where all men are seen as equal with equal opportunity with no differences, with love and unity that is all false. No, Psalm 78 says that we long for a ruler and one who reigns over us, Jesus the son of David, who must be submitted to, and here is the reality—He will not be submitted to by force. It is only through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in His people that will cause them to honor and obey His Law; and as Christian parents transmit and send forth that Law and that gospel to their children, it has a domino effect.

Psalm 78 is pessimistic at the beginning; it's optimistic at the end, to say that your nation, my nation, our nation is not the final arbiter of truth and justice, and history has shown that with or without the United States, God will accomplish His goals. His kingdom has been established. His Son has been enthroned. So, we pray for our nation. We pray for repentance because why would we not want to see God preserve our nation? But He's not obligated to do that. So, as the church, we remember God's Law, we stand on God's Law, we uphold God's Law regardless of the consequences, and we trust that King Jesus is ruling and reigning over all things. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.