

FAITHFUL GENERATIONS

2nd February 2020

Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-10

At the time of the communist takeover, China was the jewel of international missionary community. There were some 7,000 foreign missionaries in China when, almost overnight, Mao forced them out.

And what did they leave behind? What was the fruit of some 400 years of missionary endeavour? Well, less than 1% of the half billion population were Christians. Less

than 1%! And then all foreign support vanishes - in an instant. Indeed, as the bamboo curtain slammed shut Christians worldwide were genuinely concerned. How could this fledging church survive?



One missionary, who'd been booted out lamented, "We feel so sorry for the church we've left behind. They've no one to teach them, no printing presses, no Bible Colleges, no one to run their medical clinics and orphanages. No resources - except the Holy Spirit." However, it appears the Holy Spirit did just fine.

For, despite decades of silence and despite the Chinese church being hounded and persecuted, China is now experiencing the longest revival in history. There are now an estimated 100 million Christians (out of 1.4B = 7%). This is more than official membership of the Communist party. Indeed, China has more Christians than any other nation.

And one of the key reasons Christianity not only survives but flourishes is because of the faithful generation. Of the few in 1950 they held fast to God and his word and diligently passed their faith onto their children and grandchildren. Without any support from the international church it was their faithfulness that gave the Holy Spirit something to work with when revival broke out in the late 70s and which continues today.

And so how do we as parents, grandparents and even great grandparents do the same? How can we be a faithful generation to our children and grandchildren? Well, this is what our passage in Deuteronomy 4 is all about. This is what we'll be opening up. So, after briefly setting Deuteronomy in its context, the text will show us five characteristics of a faithful generation – five characteristics we can work toward.

Once we've explored these areas, we'll finish with some take homes - how we can put all this into practice. So, the...

I. Context of Deuteronomy

II. A Faithful Generation

III. Application

I. Context of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Bible. It's the last of the Pentateuch - five books attributed to Moses describing a God who creates and a God who sets aside a people for himself. The time frame finds the people of Israel ready to enter Promised Land after being rescued them from slavery and after forty years of desert wandering. However, there are two major problems as they gather for the final push over the border. Firstly, Moses will not be entering with them and secondly the original generation who first received God's law are now dead. There's a new generation! And with no Moses how will they know how to be right with God and right with each other?

So, Moses gathers the whole assembly together to give God's law a second time. And this is the context of Deuteronomy. It's all about passing God's Word onto the next generation. Why? So, they can live it out with integrity, and so they can pass it on to their children and grandchildren.

II. A Faithful Generation

So let's open up this passage to see what a faithful generation looks like - 4:1...

Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Deuteronomy 4:1

a. Know the Blessings of God's Word

So, to be a faithful generation is to know - to experience - the blessings of God's Word. Just a note - where we see the words "decree" and "law" think "Bible", God's Word. Anyway, notice here the benefits of God's Word. Following God's Word means we will live. And not just physically life. It's not just referring to the beating of the heart and drawing of another breath. No, we're talking "life and it's fullness". A fullness including the emotional and spiritual alongside the physical. Jesus sums it up well when he said in John 10:10...

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Yes, without Christ we are vulnerable to wicked plans and schemes of Satan. But with Christ and his Word we have abundant life, life in all fullness. Just, as we passed physical life onto our children, we are also keen to pass on this abundant life onto them as well. And there are more and more blessings. The many promises of God's Word that we've seen come true in our lives. Yes, because we know God's blessings, we're motivated to pass them on.

b. Respects God's Word

To be a faithful generation not only means knowing but also respecting God's Word, verse 2...

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you. Deuteronomy 4:2

We're not to add or subtract from the Word as we pass it on. And so, we must be careful not to add by saying things like "We need Christ and something else to be saved". Like, "We need Christ and the law" No. Or, "We need Christ and belong to a particular church to be saved" No. "We need Christ and a meat free diet to be saved". You get the picture. We do not add conditions that are not in his Word,

And what's been more concerning is what people try and take away from God's Word. We must stand firm and resist people who try and take away the virgin birth, the miracles of Christ and his physical, bodily resurrection. To be a faithful generation we must hold fast to God's Word and pass it on without addition or subtraction.

Yes, we take heed of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:18

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Matthew 5:18

c. Obey God's Word

Next, to be a faithful generation is to obey God's Word. Yes, we know God's Word, we don't add or subtract, and we also obey. Moses drives this home with an ugly incident that'd happened just a few short months before, verse 3

You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did at Baal Peor. The Lord your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, 4 but all of you who held fast to the Lord your God are still alive today. Deuteronomy 4:3-4

Now, what's Moses on about here? Well as the Israelites neared the Promised Land, nations on the wilderness side of the Jordan River attacked God's people but were soundly beaten. The King of Moab and the Midianites saw what happened to their neighbours and were terrified. So, while Israel was camped at Baal Peor the king offered the pagan prophet Balaam truckloads of money to curse God's people. But he was thwarted by... do you remember... by a talking donkey. Look it up in Numbers 22. Anyway, Balaam was sneaky and wanted his gold, so he took the king aside and advised, "A direct attack's never going to work - try sex and idols". So, at Baal Peor the Israelites descend into debauchery as the Moabite king made both his pretty girls and idols available. Now God was not to be mocked. He's Holy and true as should his people who are called by his name. So, he sends a plague until the priest's son Phinehas saves the day, though not before 24,000 Israelites die of the plague. This is all in Numbers 25 and is what Moses is reminding the people here in verse 3. Those who disobeyed God's word - by idol worship and wanton sex were killed while those who held fast to God's Word... well they were still alive and about to Enter the Promised Land. What a powerful lesson!

Now, this is an extreme and thankfully a one-off example but even today as a faithful generation, we know to obey God's Word. From experience we know that when we disobey God's Word it catches up with us - big time. But when we obey God's Word - when we hold fast - we are blessed, just as Jesus said in Matthew 7:24

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Matthew 7:24

Yes, a faithful generation remains faithful through life's storms because we've learnt to be obedient. This joy and resilience are what we want to pass onto our children.

d. Are Careful with God's Word

Next we see that to be a faithful generation is to be careful with God's Word. We see this in verse 9...

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live.
Deuteronomy 4:9

A faithful generation can pass on the love of Christ to the next generation because we guard our hearts. We hide God's Word in our heart and will not let it slip. We remember God's kindness and favour and cling to this in tough times.

And this “letting slip” is a bigger danger than we think. For unless we carefully watch ourselves, we easily forget God’s past blessings. And when we do, we’re in danger of going through the motions of a faith with no heart. Of following Christian habits but where the love of Christ has grown cold and his Word slips away from our hearts.

And of course, this is what happened to the Pharisees. They had great Bible knowledge and were diligent in their duties - attending church, praying and doing their best - but any love for God had slipped from their hearts.

Yes, a faithful generation watches closely. We’re on our guard, least our, abundant, vital and joyful walk with Christ slips away to be replaced by a bland, sterile and “going through the motions” ritual. In Matthew 11:25

Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Matthew 11:25

A faithful generation learns to guard their heart. To keep it as young child’s - ever open and trusting in their heavenly Father

e. Teach Children God’s Word

And finally, a faithful generation intentionally teaches Christ and his Word to children - their own and others. Verse 9 and 10

Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, “Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.” Deuteronomy 4:9b–10

Notice the double emphasis on teaching children. A faithful generation does more than lead by example - we intentionally teach our children. Matthew 19:13 has this account...

Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Matthew 19:13–14

And so, these are the characteristics of a faithful generation. We...

- a. Know the Blessings of God's Word
- b. Respect God's Word
- c. Obey God's Word
- d. Careful with God's Word
- e. Teach Children God's Word

III. Application

And all this brings us to application - our take homes. How are we to be a faithful generation? How are we to teach our children and Grandchildren the wonder of and trust in Christ?

There are two basic ways. We teach our children at church and in the home. We teach our own children and help teach the children of others. In church how are we a faithful generation? One way is to commission a Youth Intern, as we have today. We praise God for Phoebe who has been obedient to God's call on her life and has a heart to pass on the love of Christ and his Word to our teenagers. Today we've commissioned her to do this on our behalf. We all can't be involved in youth or children's ministry. So, we commission. And we certainly do not leave her alone. In no way. Phoebe will be looking to build a team to pray, encourage and help practically. No ministry is a lone ranger ministry. All ministry is team ministry. So, with Phoebe and her team to be and Mandi with her team who are teaching our children as I speak, and with Messy Church, Mainly Music and holiday programs we intentionally seek to be a faithful generation - to pass on the blessings we've received to our children and their children.

And I've only scratched the surface of what can be done by a church. And we know that all this needs to be applied in our homes. And I know many are doing this with their children and grandchildren. So be encouraged, be spurred on and be creative - as we seek to build Christ and his Word into our young ones and our youth.

Let's pray