



November 4, 2012  
Guest: Pastor Kirk Bottomly  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

*Living for the Long Term:  
The Stewardship of Our Legacy*  
Psalm 78, Jeremiah 35, Hebrews 11

Here's a picture of the grandfather clock that's in my living room. When it chimes the hour, the whole house vibrates and shakes. It wakes you up at 3am and 4am, like a powerful Scottish grandfather making his presence heard and felt. The clock was built in Scotland, in 1860, where my great-great-grandfather bought it. When he died my grandmother's dad—Alexander Laird, who was a Presbyterian minister born in Scotland, pastoring in New Jersey—went over to Scotland and brought this family clock home to America.

It was in my grandmother's home where I first heard it, and when Nana died, my mother decided it should be mine. It arrived one afternoon in a long wooden crate, like a coffin. But we opened it up and raised it from the dead. It reminds me of my grandmother, it connects me to her. But it also connects me to a Scottish Presbyterian minister I never knew. And here I am today—my name is Scottish, Kirk, means church (of all things). I'm a Presbyterian minister, and whenever that clock chimes it reminds me that the impact of our life vibrates... long after we step out of this world. It can be heard and felt five generations later by children not yet born.

I want a legacy like that clock. I want my life to be felt like that. How about you? It can. God wants you to have that kind of impact.

Today we want to focus on something else you may not think much about—the stewardship of your legacy. How do we live life for the long-term? Not so we live long. The Bible says, "It's appointed for everybody to die" [sometime]. How do we live so that our life continues to change the world, shape the world for God even after our life here ends?

Wouldn't you like to know how to do that?—how your life can keep impacting the world beyond your life. God wants us to do that. That's called a legacy. You want to live for God; you want your life to count for God's kingdom. Are you stewarding your life so that you will continue to have a spiritual and moral impact on this world even after you're gone? You're gone... but you're not gone. Many in my generation have mortgaged their futures by living on credit. We won't have much if anything to leave our kids—we spent it on ourselves. Is the same thing true of our spiritual estate? Is there a legacy there?

Psalm 78—this is The Message version—goes like this:

<sup>1-4</sup> Listen, dear friends, to God's truth,  
bend your ears to what I tell you.  
...I'll let you in on the sweet old truths,  
Stories we heard from our fathers,  
counsel we learned at our mother's knee.  
[You know what that's called—that's legacy.]  
We're not keeping this to ourselves,  
we're passing it along to [what?] the next generation—  
God's fame and fortune,  
the marvelous things he has done.

<sup>5-8</sup> He planted a witness in Jacob,  
set his Word firmly in Israel,  
Then commanded our parents  
[what did he command them?]  
to teach it to their children  
So the next generation would know,  
and all the generations to come—  
[even the children yet to be born,  
and they in turn will tell their children]  
Know God's truth and tell God's stories.  
So they will put their trust in God,  
And never forget his works,  
And ever keep his commands.

That's a legacy. This psalm is describing how the community of faith keeps faith and passes faith on. This is us; this should be us. This is a project that reaches beyond you to your kids... to your grandkids and their kids, children who aren't even born yet. Not just your biological kinfolk, but the children who are baptized by us and discipled by us... our youth, our young adults, the kids they have, the people they reach for Christ, the believers they disciple. They are our spiritual kin.

Are you thinking about them? Are you praying for them? Are you claiming them for Christ? Do you have a vision of them as mighty men and women of God who will do even greater things for the kingdom than you?

Wouldn't that be a fantastic future? What a precious legacy to be investing in right now, instead of just going through life spending ourselves and our resources and when it's time to check out, we're done. We're gone. Who's next? How can we still be here changing the world on a God-scale in the most worthy, most important venture in history—God's kingdom? Here's how you do it: You live life for the long term.

How do you do that? Let's look at three "legacy" stories in the Bible: one from Jeremiah, one from Jesus, one from Hebrews 11.

In Jeremiah 35 there's a story you may not know. Jeremiah had a tough job. He was the prophet of bad news; when he showed up, everybody went: "Oh no, not him." When you opened the bulletin and discovered he was the preacher, you'd try to duck out of church... to go volunteer in the nursery, go hang out in the Café. Jeremiah's message was: God is fed up! People of Israel, you've exhausted God's patience, and the Babylonians have been appointed to come in and take the whole nation captive into exile. Your cities will be destroyed, your land laid waste. Jerusalem will be burned, and the glorious Temple of God—you all imagined was your good-luck charm that will keep you safe in spite of your disobedience and idolatry—will be broken down and burned down. See what I mean? Who wants to hear that?

[Chapter 35.]

<sup>1</sup> This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD during the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the Rekabite family and invite them to come to one of the side rooms of the house of the LORD and give them wine to drink."

<sup>3</sup> So I went to get Ja-azaniah and his brothers and all his sons—the whole family of the Rekabites. <sup>4</sup> I brought them into the house of the LORD, into [one of its side rooms]. <sup>5</sup> Then I set pitchers full of wine and some cups before them and said to them, "Drink some wine."

Now here's the deal. The Rekabites were like the Amish in Israel... seriously. When Israel entered the Promised Land, they came along. They were actually Midianites, relatives of Jethro the priest of Midian whose daughter Moses married. They were ethnically Kenites, a nomadic people who originally lived in the Sinai, shepherding goats and sheep. That's where Moses met them, married one of their women when he was living in exile from Egypt. They were not really interested in the land of Canaan, but Moses recruited them because they knew the Sinai... which is where Israel spent the next 40 years. They would know the footpaths, they would know the water sources.

And 40 years later when Israel conquered Canaan, they came along and settled in the land. But they were not interested in any of the amenities of civilization. We're not gonna farm, we're not gonna build houses. We like living in tents and we like sheep and goats. ...Homeschooling. Leave us alone, we're at "home on the range." And like the Amish, they preserved an old-fashioned nomadic lifestyle away from the towns and cities.

They adopted Israel's faith; they worshipped Yahweh. Ja-azaniah, the clan-patriarch, has a Hebrew name, means "Yahweh-the-LORD hears." You know how converts to faith can often be more passionate in their believing and practice than people born and raised in a faith?

I came to Christ when I was a teenager—and I was totally amazed that regular church people weren't as excited about Jesus as I was. What was the matter with them? Why don't they read their Bibles? Why don't they share their faith with their friends? This gospel is the greatest thing in the world and it just seems so ordinary and trivial to them.

The Recabites were like that: passionate about Yahweh, passionate about being nomads... and that made them weird. Their customs and lifestyle were stuck in a period that ended for everybody else 200 years ago. Imagine somebody dressing and living today like it was 1812 instead of 2012. Why are you dressed up like John Adams? That was the Recabites.]

Okay, have you figured it out? The Rekabites don't drink wine. Wine is an agricultural product. You gotta farm... cultivate grapes. "We don't do grapes, we do goats. We've got great yogurt; we don't drink wine. Wine is one of those corrupting things that goes with "civilization," and for us, the jury is out on civilization. Judging by Canaan, Egypt and Babylon, civilization looks pretty pagan."

<sup>5</sup> "I set pitchers full of wine before them and said, "Drink some wine." <sup>6</sup> But they replied, "We do not drink wine, because our ancestor Jehonadab son of Rekab gave us this command: 'Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine. <sup>7</sup> Also you must never build houses, sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things, but must always live in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.' <sup>8</sup> We have obeyed everything our ancestor commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine <sup>9</sup> or built houses to live in or had vineyards, fields or crops. <sup>10</sup> We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our ancestor Jehonadab commanded us.

When the Babylonians invaded Judah, the Rekabites were living out in the middle of nowhere with their goats, but they were forced to pull up tent and flee to Jerusalem for refuge. They're refugees when Jeremiah finds them. And with such a dramatic change in their living situation—and being as it's a time of crisis, maybe the usual "family rules" would get suspended. "How about a little wine?" And they say, "No." And Jeremiah turns to the people of Judah and they say, "Nhhh. Here it comes, the bad news."

<sup>17</sup> The Lord God Almighty says, 'Learn a lesson here about obedience. The Rekabites don't drink wine because 200 years ago their ancestor Jehonadab told them once not to. But I have spoken to you again and again, and you refuse to listen or obey. The families of Rekab have obeyed their ancestor completely—but you have refused to listen to me.'

Here is a very impressive legacy. It's kind of a crazy legacy: for the centuries to come, our people are going to live in tents, herd goats, we will not build houses or plant vineyards or drink wine, no electricity, no running water, we're gonna eat yogurt and drink bottled water—even after everybody else is sipping chardonnay with their own estate label, everybody else living in 30,000 square-foot homes with remodeled kitchens and swimming pools and big flat-screen tvs. Not us.

They don't say anything about their faith. That's not the point. Jeremiah thinks they're weird too, but he's impressed:

- Here's a family that keeps their vows to a fallible human leader (their ancestor Rekab), but the people of God break their covenant with their infallible leader the LORD.
- Jehonadab told his family once "we're not going to drink wine", and they said "OK" for the next 200 years [when it was far from convenient to oblige and seemed like a silly rule]. God commanded Israel "again and again" to turn from sin, and they refused.
- The Rekabites obeyed rules that had no eternal significance, peculiar cultural taboos that kept them separate from "civilization," made them look weird as the world changed around them. Amish. Meantime Israel totally sold out to the pagan culture they conquered—who conquered who? And they ended up compromising God's permanent eternal principles, and from the world's perspective, they all looked perfectly normal, except the God who loved and saved them gave them their Land of Promise, they rejected. They squandered their spiritual inheritance. That was their legacy.
- The Rekabites observed old-fashioned nomadic customs for the sake of a family tradition; how much more should we obey God's Word—the traditions of our spiritual family, that preserve our spiritual heritage!

The take-away here is pretty clear, isn't it?

Let's us church, people of Jesus, Chapel Hill—let us establish a 200-year legacy. A legacy that honors and preserves our family identity. Can we do that? Can we teach God's Word to our children and grandchildren—the glorious message of the gospel of Jesus, the stories of our spiritual ancestors (Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah)—can we imprint on them our unique identity as Christian believers, the quality of a supernatural life full of God's grace and God's truth?

Are we raising our kids like that... our grandkids? Are we leading our families like that? Are we setting a pattern in our homes that is getting passed on to our grown-up children? The centrality of faith, the truth and stories of the Bible, a life of prayer, the 10 commandments and the Great Commandment, the things we will not compromise as we live in this fallen culture.

Those are things learned first and foremost at home, from parents and grandparents, not in one hour a week in Sunday School. It's the lifestyle and life-message of the family. And when it's done right and done in community and done

with integrity and grace—we can establish a 200-year legacy like the Rekabites. “Lord, we want to do that.”

Let me just say to our young people... I mean, anybody under the age of 50: this means there must be respect for the tradition and church that’s being handed to you. The reason there’s a church here today is because there was a handoff a generation ago. That’s the only way Christianity survives. It gets handed to you, and you hand it off, or it dies. And there’s always a big temptation to treat our father’s church like our father’s Oldsmobile—it’s obsolete, it’s uncool. But this church is about one thing: the Word of God which contains the gospel of Jesus Christ. That Word, that gospel never changes. That’s the tradition.

As we hand this church off to you, that’s the one thing you’ve got to be faithful to, the one unchangeable thing. You can mess with everything else, really. As long as this message gets home to you and passed to your kids and to your grandkids. Will you accept that mission—and the commitment that goes with it—across your lifetime, from our generation to your generation to the next generation? The world’s going to say, “What a bunch of Rekabites!” Are you going to say back, “We don’t give a rip. This is who we are. This is not just a promise we made to our parents, not just a trust we received from them—this is God’s call on our whole life, for our whole lifetime. That’s how you build a legacy.

The second story is one you all know: the parable of the sower. Jesus is teaching. In Mark, this is the very first story he tells, so I think it must have been a central story he told everywhere he preached.

Listen! A farmer went out to sow seed. And the seed goes everywhere, right? Some falls on the footpath where it gets trampled and the birds gobble it up. Some falls among the rocks and it springs up, but the soil’s shallow so there’s no root. And it withers in the hot sun. Other seed falls among thorns which choke it; it never grows to maturity.

And Jesus says, the seed is “the word”—the word of God, the word of God’s kingdom, the message of the gospel. Satan comes like the birds and snatches the word as soon as it falls. Or trouble comes and when there’s no root to anchor it, it doesn’t survive. The thorns are like the worries of this life and a preoccupation with money and things—they choke our souls so we don’t grow to maturity, spiritually stunted and retarded by our stuff. But there’s seed sown on good soil, Jesus says. They hear the word, take it in, they put down roots, they clear the weeds and thorns out... and they produce a crop—30, 60, 100 fold.

You know, I read that and in my spirit I say: “I want to cultivate a hundredfold harvest.” How about you? Now there’s a legacy! You start one seed—the gospel falls into the soil of your soul—and one generation, two... we’re looking at a

hundred heads of grain. That's a very good harvest. 30's good. 60's fantastic. If that's your legacy, that's nothing to be ashamed of. God will say, "Way to go!"

Why not a hundredfold? Why not pray, Lord, may I fall into the ground and die like a seed must—die to myself and my agenda—and by the supernatural power of your Spirit, may I be part of a community of faith that cultivates a hundredfold harvest.

You don't do this alone. This is a team effort. This is all of us in this together: plowing the soil, clearing the rocks and the weeds, chasing the birds off, casting the seed into each other's lives, into our kids' lives, our grandkids. Making sure this church is a Bible church... now and 10 years from now and a hundred years from now.

Do you think God wants that? He does; so let's invest ourselves in this church—this is our field, our faith-venture—and let's build a legacy that will endure and prosper like a spectacular harvest year after year for the next hundred years. (Lord, help us to become that church!) A 200-year legacy, a hundredfold harvest...

The third story is the story of Abraham in Hebrews chapter 11.

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when called to leave Mesopotamia and go to Canaan, to a land God would give him, he obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents. So did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

<sup>11</sup> And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children [why? read the rest of this sentence with me:] because she considered Him faithful who had made the promise. <sup>12</sup> And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

So here's Abraham... born and raised in the most advanced civilization in the ancient world, Ur of the Chaldees. He's no Rekabite. He had everything civilization had to offer. And God said, I want you to leave this. I've got another place for you... and for your kids and grandkids. And so Abraham left; Scripture says he didn't even know where he was going. And he lived in tents for the rest of his life—camping, the next three generations. When Abraham died, the only real estate he owned was a gravesite in Hebron.

But God had made a promise Abraham knew would be kept. And whenever he looked out on the scrubby pastures of Shechem and Beersheba and Hebron, he believed God for a future he couldn't see except in his spiritual imagination. The day would come when he would trade his tent and dirt floor for "a city with foundations," God's future for him way over the horizon of his life.

Can you live like that... beyond the horizon of your own life? The world doesn't think like that, doesn't live like that, doesn't spend its money or invest its resources like that. That's crazy. All there is is here and now. You gotta live for that.

Abraham lived by faith. He was a citizen of Chaldea, just like we are citizens of America, the greatest country in the world. But his ultimate citizenship... he had the most enviable passport in the world! Oh what people would have given to have a Babylonian passport! The time came to trade it in for another citizenship, to pledge allegiance to a kingdom he could only see and visit by faith. American believers, what is the country you love most? Compared to its glory, all the privileges and abundance and blessings of the world's greatest country are like living in a tent. Are you ready even now to pull up stakes and move, liquidate assets here if need be and invest in the city that has everlasting foundations?

2000 years after Abraham Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God. And in that eternal kingdom where God is King and everything is right—there's a table, a big ol' supper table... big enough for a couple billion people. It's the table of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And people will come, Jesus said, from all over the world—north, south, east, west—to sit at table there in that kingdom.

There's joy in that kingdom, there's peace in that kingdom—the shalom of God—the presence of God fills that kingdom and that kingdom is forever. The city of God is an everlasting city. That's what Abraham left Ur for, and you know what he would say? It was totally worth it!

One night God poked Abraham, woke him up, said, "Psst! Come outside. I want to show you something." And the old man looked up into the sky, shining with a million stars. God said, "Abraham, start counting. That's how many children and grandchildren I'm going to give you." I wonder how late the old man stayed up that night. He was 90 years old and he and Sarah had no children.

But right there, as old as he was, Abraham believed God for a million grandchildren. The Word of God—this word that is full of impossible promises—challenges me too. Believe God for a million spiritual children and grandchildren who come to faith in Christ through the ministry of this church, the missions it supports, the kids we raise, our presence and witness in this community. By faith God can make it happen. Pray with me: "God, give us a million grandkids."

<sup>13</sup> All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. <sup>14</sup>

People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own... <sup>16</sup> longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.



<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He...was about to sacrifice his one and only son, <sup>18</sup> even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac all these offspring I promised you will come." <sup>19</sup> Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead. And that's what happened, in a way: he got Isaac back from the dead.

It takes a special pair of glasses to look through and see your life beyond this life. That's what Jesus Christ gives us: he died and broke a way through for us to resurrection-life. He spent his life for us because he knew the life God has for us is bigger, longer, stronger than this life and our deaths.

When Abraham offered up Isaac, he had a little piece of that faith. And the challenge to us, living on this side of the Cross and Easter morning, is to live beyond this life, to invest in something bigger than our lives... to spend our lives now like we really believe in eternal life.

That's how we live for the long-term, friends. We start imprinting our truths and values, our lifestyle and our faith so 200 years from now our spiritual kids and grandkids are still living it. We make sure the spiritual field here is plowed and cleared and free of weeds and thorns... and we sow for a harvest 30, 60, 100-fold. We pledge our allegiance every Sunday to the King of kings, to a heavenly country—the kingdom of God. We believe God for a massive spiritual posterity over the next hundred years and beyond, that will glorify not us but Him—"Lord, give us a million grandchildren."

To that holy mission we pledge our life and our fortunes—and we will spend both now like we believe in eternal life and "treasure in heaven."

Lord Jesus, you have led the way into God's future. You have shown us what that everlasting kingdom and its glory looks like. We want to follow you there. And we want to take as many with us as we can. We want the doors of this church to be a gateway to your kingdom—for generations that are still to be born. Give us faith to believe you and to work for that amazing legacy. Amen.

## Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. What do you think was the most important point in the sermon? Why is it important?
2. What other reflections do you have about the sermon by Pastor Kirk Bottomly?
3. How do you think the sermon applies to us as a congregation?
4. What is it that God wants you to do as a result of hearing this sermon?