

METHUSELAH

By Pr. William P. Terjesen

I was watching *Mysteries of the Bible* and they were talking about Noah and the Great Flood. One of the rabbis, I guess a reformed rabbi, was talking about the longevity of the pre-flood peoples. He said that his father used to tell him that one of the saddest stories in the Bible is the story of Methuselah. Why? Because it is recorded of Methuselah that he lived 969 years and all he did was have sons and daughters. How sad to live that long and have nothing to show for it but the fathering of children (Gen 5.25-27). I guess that's supposed to be ironic Jewish wisdom or something. But it is wrong on several counts.

One of the things that has gone terribly wrong in our culture is the way family life is viewed in the scheme of things. It is so often played down and relegated to the sidelines despite the fact that the Bible teaches us that, next to our relationship with God, family is to be the most important, most cherished thing in our lives. It is true that many people in the Bible accomplished many great things in addition to what they did within their families. But this does not minimize the utter importance of family life. In fact, there are few more noble things that a person can do than to have a family and to raise good, healthy children in a loving environment where they are taught to love God and to love their neighbor.

Today we are told to send our children off to school earlier and earlier lest we rob them of the much needed socialization that takes place away from the home. I say that the best socialization takes place in a proper home environment where people are taught to get along and live together in some sense of harmony with their siblings and their parents. The idea that this can't happen without nursery school or pre-K is simply ludicrous. I get so sad when I see parents fretting with guilt under the pressure to send their three year old off to some "professional socializers" so that the child will grow up and develop normally. Hogwash! In a loving family, a child will learn all the necessary social skills in the rough and tumble of daily family life. The family is one of the best proving grounds there is. It's where all of our sins show themselves for what they are, and where our talents are nurtured.

Parents are all too ready to capitulate to the pressure to send their children off to be trained by professionals, because it gets them off the hook, and because in our selfish world, it enables them to pay more attention to their own wants and desires. Professionals claim that families are hotbeds for abuse, oppression and other societal ills. Dad would rather let others take the lead in the raising of the children, and Mom would rather go back to work. The result? Family life is somewhere down the list of priorities rather than on the top. This is not the way God intended things to be.

The Lord's priorities for us look something like this: God first, family second, business third. I have a sneaking suspicion that Methuselah might have accomplished more in his having and raising his family over his long life than many famous or important people did with their impressive worldly achievements. Certainly his son Lamech and his grandson Noah are indications of his skill as a family patriarch.

We know almost nothing of Lamech, but what we do know is telling. Gen 5.29 says, "And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." Lamech named his son Noah, which means rest or comfort. He prophesied that he would bring comfort to the devout. This reveals that Lamech was a deeply devout and spiritual man. Is it folly to suppose that Methuselah had something to do with this?

And about Methuselah's grandson Noah we learn, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of

the Lord" (Gen 6.8), and, "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (Gen 6.9), and further, "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Gen 6.22). Out of all the people in the world, only Noah and his family were spared the judgment of the Flood, and it was through them that God made a new beginning of life on earth. Is it too much to think that maybe Methuselah played a positive part in Noah's life?

History is littered with unsung people who did little more than raise their families to the best of their abilities, with all their strengths and weaknesses, and in so doing bequeathed to the world men and women who made their mark in history. It is ultimately God who gives the world great people, but God works through means, even in temporal matters. And one of those means is the discipline and nurture of family life. A good example of this is Martin Luther. Few would be foolish enough to deny the greatness of Luther, a man who changed western civilization in a fundamental way. Now Luther's parents weren't rocket scientists, and they certainly weren't faultless. But they did what they could to raise their son right as far as they understood it. Luther played his part by the grace of God and by that grace accomplished great things. But part of what made Luther Luther, was the influence of his parents, mistakes and all.

So don't let anyone tell you that having and raising a family is not that important. We'll never do anything more important, though we may do many things that are greatly important. And when you read about old Methuselah and consider that the only information that the Bible records about him is his great age and his having of sons and daughters, realize that the lesson is not one of sadness that the poor old guy never did anything more noteworthy than live long and have children. The lesson is that often peoples' unsung faithfulness in their families stands behind the greatness of many of history's greatest figures.