

*A Family Promise Being Kept...*

*For Over 200 Years*

By: Kim Dozier

Back in the early 1800s, Mr. and Mrs. Nations and their family received a very disturbing invitation. It was to a hanging! Of course, this was highly unusual, but because it was the last request of a man whom they had watched grow up in their hometown, they agreed to accept.

The Nations made the trip and mournfully stood in the crowd surrounding the gallows. The man who was to be hung saw them and a noticeable calmness came over his face. When he was given an opportunity to speak his last words, he said, "I just want to apologize to the Nations." The Nations gasped in surprise and the crowd turned to see the astonished looks upon their faces. The man went on to explain that his first steps to the hangman's noose started back in their general store when he was just a little boy.

The hushed crowd listened as the man continued, "I would go into the store every day just to look around. One day I decided to steal a slate pencil. The store was crowded, so I got away with it. A few days later, I stole some candy. I learned how to sneak and I learned how to steal. Stealing led to gambling and that led to drinking. One day, it all led to murder. Each step that I took in life brought me closer and closer to this noose."

There was not a dry eye in the crowd. All were deeply touched by this man's words but none more so than the Nations. "Now, I'm not blaming you kind folks—'tweren't your fault. It was my own doing! Each step that I took along the way was my own choice. Many times I could have chosen a better path, but I didn't. I can't go back and undo what has already been done but hopefully, I can keep someone else from making the same mistakes! I asked you to come here today so that I could confess to you and ask for your forgiveness. I also hope that you will tell your children and your children's children about me so that they will make better choices throughout their journey in life. Maybe then at least something good will come of my life and even from my death." The Nations forgave the man and agreed to make sure that his story would indeed live on for many generations. He thanked them for granting his last request, and then... his life was taken.

This story reminds me of what we are told in Psalm 78: 1-7, “

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.”

As Christians, it is vitally important that we pass our faith along to the next generation. We must not leave this task to chance nor expect someone else to take up this responsibility for us. It is our mission and it is something that God commands us to do. There are no “retirement years” in God’s Kingdom—we must all continue His work until Jesus comes. Thankfully, we see that kind of godly work ethic within the “Young-at-Heart” group where we attend church in Madison, Alabama.

Several years ago, the elders asked my husband if we would be interested in working with this group of “senior saints.” Really, there was no “talking about it;” we jumped at the opportunity! It has been a blessing to fellowship with this fine group of Christians and to have our young daughters be influenced by them. We started out with about 75 people in the group and now there are about 125. Most of the people are in their 70s and 80s, but we do have a few in their 90s and one special lady, Ms. Lula, who turned 100 this past November! By the way, she is there most every time the doors open and has just recently started walking with a cane. Her very presence and tremendous positive attitude teaches and encourages all of us more than she will ever know!

In working with these fine folks, we have been blessed beyond words. We thank God that our daughters have grown up around this generation and have learned to respect the wisdom that they have earned throughout their long lives in service to our God. We get together each month for a special time of fellowship and then we usually have a busload to go on a fall retreat with us

each year. Last year the theme was “Passing the Faith Along,” so this year, they want to do a mission trip!

This special group is extremely important, not only to us, but also to all who come in contact with them. Children benefit from seeing their strong faith in later years. Young families value hearing the godly wisdom and advice about how to rear children who remain faithful to God. Middle-age people are encouraged to see that they have so much more to look forward to and to do in His Kingdom. Last but not least, other people in the “Young-at-Heart” age group, some who have not yet put on their Lord through baptism, need to know that there is a peace in God that will weather all of the storms of life.

Whether we pass the faith along to the next generation within our own family or within our church family, the influence that we can have is absolutely priceless. The time that we take to listen, encourage, share life-lessons, and to just be there means so much. That few minutes could even determine where a precious soul will spend eternity.

It is good that Mr. and Mrs. Nations were the kind of people who this young man felt he could call upon in his darkest hour. The Nations did keep their promise. They told the story to their children and after their granddaughter was born in 1888, they told her the story over and over again as she was growing up. As God would have it, the story is now also being told to many other families across the nation and around the world by way of a children’s book. The little book is being used in homes, churches, schools, and even in various detention homes and prisons as a way of passing along the important lesson: “Watch where your steps are taking you in life.”

Some prisoners and those recovering in halfway houses are even reading the story to their children by phone (or using the Read-Along CD) to help teach them to make the right choices in life. Job 28:28 says, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.” If we do not learn important lessons like this and teach them to the next generation, where will our choices lead us for all eternity?

Because the Nations did pass their faith along, this simple yet powerful story has endured more than 200 years and is making a difference in the lives of countless others. Children love to hear how *Princess Stinky Feet* was always knee-deep in trouble until she learned to make better choices each step of the way. The book is dedicated to Granny (1888-1998) who always told the

story to me. Yes, the Nations were my great-great grandparents and my daughters are the sixth generation to hear the story, thus far.

We thank God for the wayward young man who wanted to make a difference, and we thank God for Jesus who allows us to walk in newness of life!