

The Lambs of the Flock
Isaiah 40:11

September 8, 2013

A. Introduction

1. parenting is difficult

2. text ^A: Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

B. Children Are God's Possession

1. they belong to Him ^B

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3. children can understand the gospel ^F

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1. a parting word ^G

2. our concerns today

^A Isaiah 40:1, 9

^B Ezekiel 16:21; Jeremiah 7:30-31; 1 Corinthians 7:14

^C Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 6:4-7, 10:18, 16:14, Psalm 78:1-7

^D Galatians 4:4

^E Matthew 18:1-10; Mark 10:13-16; Hebrews 1:2-3

^F Matthew 21:15-16

^G John 21:15-17

A. Introduction

1. Parenting Is Difficult

a. most of you have some stories to tell to prove this

(A) A professor – that’s a man who professes to know something – was giving lectures on child-rearing, the title of his talk being, “Ten Commandments for Parents.”

(1) After his first child he changed the title to “Seven Principles for Parents.”

(2) After two more children his speech was rewritten to become, “Three Suggestions for Parents.”

(3) Finally as his children reached the teen years he quit lecturing altogether! —{2}.

(B) One little boy came running in to his Mother and asked, “Mom, what would you like for your birthday this year?” The Mother said, “I would like 3 well-behaved children!” The little boy said, “WOW! Then there would be six of us!” —{3}.

(C) probably every parent has been forcibly reminded of their own parents’ words: “someday you will have a child just like you, and boy! will you ever be sorry!”

b. it is no wonder that sometimes parents throw up their hands and cry out in the tones of the Psalmist, “Why me, O Lord?”

(A) especially after your son yells, “well, I didn’t ask to be born!”

(B) for you know that you cannot take children back

(C) they don’t come with a sales slip that says on the bottom, “No sale is final until you are satisfied”!

c. let me suggest two reasons that God gives us children

(A) on a natural level, God permits us to experience the creative act of bringing a child into the world so that we can begin to appreciate the care He has for His creation: rebellious mankind

(B) on a supernatural level, God permits us to lead others to Jesus Christ, having fellowship with Him in this, to begin to appreciate His care for those who are born again – our spiritual children

(C) so children – be they biological or spiritual – are God’s way of allowing us who are made in His image, to experience in some measure His feelings towards mankind

d. God has a special sense of care towards children, a sense that we should share with him

- e. "Because," as Dave Kinsey always remind us in his letters, "kids matter to God."
 - f. let's just see how this is borne out the Scriptures, looking at today's
2. Text, Isaiah 40:11, "Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.'
- a. this is in that great 40th chapter of Isaiah, that beginning with those words, "'Comfort, O comfort My people,' says your God." introduces the announcements that God is Himself coming to his people
 - b. go back in this chapter to verse 9: 'Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'" (Isaiah 40:9)
 - c. Zion; Jerusalem; the people of God are called upon to announce in no uncertain terms – from the high mountain – that God is there among His people; this is the same announcement the church is still to make today, that God is here, among His people
 - d. so, in verse 11 we have God described in that marvellous picture as the Shepherd of Israel, the one who leads them as a flock
 - e. in it He gives His very special attention to the lambs – the young of His flock – and even the babies, those still being nursed by mothers

B. Children are God's Possession

- 1. They Belong to Him
 - a. in times of distress it was the practice of the nations around Israel to seek to appease their Ba'als by human sacrifices, specifically the sacrifice of their children. When Israel fell away from following the one true God, they also adopted this practice, making their children pass through the fire in the valley of Hinnon, or Gehenna, as it was called in NT times.
 - b. So, God gave this message through Ezekiel, to tell the Jews why they had been sent into exile in Babylon: "You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire." (Ezekiel 16:21)
 - c. God calls these innocent victims of their false worship "My children"
 - d. they were His, His special possession in themselves, and not because they were sacrificed, for that

sacrifice was not of God, even as He told through Jeremiah 7:30-31, '30 "For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight," declares the Lord, "they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. 31 They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind."

- e. this tells us a great deal about God's love for children; particularly the children of His people; as does this verse written by Paul, concerning children where only one parent is a believer – "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy." (1 Corinthians 7:14), the exact implications of which I shall not discuss this morning

2. He Makes Special Provision for Them

- a. in particular, for the physical needs of those who have no father,
 - (A) the command is given to Israel in Exodus 22:22, "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan."
 - (B) He makes provision for food during the festivals: "and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns." (Deuteronomy 16:14) – as well as in leaving gleanings of the harvest
 - (C) and generally acts on their behalf, "He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing." (Deuteronomy 10:18)
 - (D) Psalm 68:5 – He is the father of orphans ...
- b. but also for their spiritual training of children in general
 - (A) by parents of their own children: "4 Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)
 - (B) Deuteronomy 4:9 adds to teach these things to grandchildren
 - (C) and as we read earlier in Psalm 78, this was to be ongoing by generation after generation relaying

God's truth

c. most clearly, God's love for children is demonstrated through ...

C. Christ, the Son of God

1. In His Incarnation

- a. God could have chosen all kinds of way to enter mankind to bring salvation, for with God nothing is impossible, and in the OT there are numerous ways by which God appeared to men
- b. but God chose to do so in a way that there could be no doubt that God, in Christ, both is truly man and is truly God
- c. "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law," (Galatians 4:4)
- d. our Saviour, now exalted in heaven, can understand the heart of the youngest child ... because He was one: first a helpless babe, to a tottering tot; to an inquisitive child; yes, even to a teen-ager
- e. none of those are easy years but He faced them all for our sake, and for the sake of the lambs of the flock

2. In His Teaching

- a. In Matthew 18:1-10, the Lord selects an actual child to answer the disciples' question as to who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven
 - (A) the lesson of the child is the primacy of humbling oneself in complete dependence upon God (and His mercy as provided in Jesus Christ) if one is to enter the kingdom of God
 - (B) the child exemplifies humility because of its dependence
 - (C) but that isn't all that Jesus had to say about children
 - (D) he also tells how serious it is if anyone should hinder a child from believing in Jesus – better that person be drowned!
 - (E) then, in a somewhat perplexing verse as to its exact meaning, Jesus says that these little ones have 'their angels in heaven'
- b. in that well known story recorded in Matthew 19, as well as where we read it in Mark 10:13-16, the disciples, not understanding that their busy Rabbi saw children as no less a part of His ministry and just

as important in God's eyes, tried to shoo them away – Luke describes them as mere babies

(A) but Jesus was indignant (NAS); that word is too weak – He was angry – had they forgotten so soon the lesson he had given to them in Matthew 18:1-10?

(B) and, in keeping with out text

(1) 'in His arms He will gather the lambs'

(2) this Jesus of Nazareth, the "... Son, whom He (God the Father) appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, ..." (Hebrews 1:2-3)

(3) took these children into His arms and blessed them

(4) 'Because kids matter to God.'

3. Children Can Understand the Gospel

a. George Barna does Christian surveys and has found that the ages of 4 to 14 are the most likely years for a person to come to Christ

b. children can see where adults are blind

(A) it was that first Palm Sunday with Jesus making His triumphal entry into Jerusalem

(B) there Jesus cast out the merchants doing business in the temple

(C) then he healed the blind and the lame who came to Him

(D) 'But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant ("angry") and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?'"' (Matthew 21:15-16)

(E) the ministers and the religious rulers failed to recognise their Messiah; but the children did and they praised Him

c. because children understand, our ministry to them is so important

d. they are 'the Lambs of the Flock' and God loves them

D. Conclusion

1. A Parting Word

- a. was spoken to Peter by the Lord Jesus
- b. it was after the crucifixion; after the resurrection; it is found in the last chapter of John's Gospel; John 21
- c. Peter at the trumped up trial of Christ had denied him three times
- d. now Jesus asks Peter three times: do you love me?
- e. three times Peter answers "Yes"
- f. and three times Jesus Gives to Peter a commission
 - (A) 1. Feed My lambs
 - (B) 2. Shepherd My sheep
 - (C) 3. Feed My Sheep
- g. did you note that order: first of all ... the children

2. Our Concerns Today

- a. firstly, that we have spiritual children in this church – those who are recent believers ... perhaps only a year or two ... in Jesus Christ
 - (A) I have a burden that they be fed with the sincere milk of God's word, nourished in Scripture: feed His lambs
 - (B) pray that we be able to nurture these up to maturity in Christ
- b. secondly, that God has given to us many who come to our Awana
 - (A) some from Christian homes; others, not
 - (B) children for which we have the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel, the wonderful news of salvation by grace through faith
 - (C) pray for these men and women who prepare and go out Monday after Monday in order to make this message known
 - (D) any church is only one generation away from extinction – it is imperative we minister to these whom God has given to us

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2. *'What God Expects of Christian Parents,'* by Michael P. Green – Kerux illustrations #1011
3. From *'Giving Your Children Back To God,'* by Rev'd Jim Mooney – Kerux sermons #9066