

## **“The Gift of Children” Psalm 127:3-5**

This morning we continue to look at the theme of love from God’s perspective. We noted already this month that God is love, and everything he gives us flows from that love. I confess there are things I do not understand, that are hard to see as flowing out of love, like the still born baby, or the child with cancer, or the car accident that leaves a child an orphan, but I also know that I do not see the whole picture. I will not try to give answers for things I do not fully understand, but I will, by faith, say “God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good” because all that he does flows out of his love for us.

Last week we saw that out of his love for us God gave us marriage, where a man and a woman can pledge themselves to each other for life. Marriage under God can be a beautiful thing. That was God’s design and plan for family.

Today we look into the biblical meaning of family a little more, and find that it includes the giving of children. They are not an afterthought, an accident, an “oops” or a burden. Rather, scripture has a very different picture of children.

Did you hear what children are called in our passage today? (v. 3)

- a heritage from God
- an inheritance from God
- a gift from God

... depending on which English translation you are using. It does not matter what the translation, the message is the same: Children are precious, and are a gift from God.

It is so easy to take for granted having children around. Their laughter and talk and cries and chatter can annoy us at times, but we would not want a world without it.

I watch science fiction programs, and one of the themes describes a world destroyed by nuclear war, and now there are no more children. Of course, that would be the end of mankind if we could no longer have children. Children are the promise of a new generation, a future.

Lise and I have had many conversations about how much evil there is in our world today. Crime is on the rise, politics is getting uglier, war is all around, new diseases seem to crop up every year. It is easy to get very pessimistic about the future, and decide that it would not be fair to bring children into this kind of world.

But having children has always been an act of faith. When Adam and Eve were blessed with a son, Cain, it was a sign that despite their sin, life would continue. They would live on through their children, and their children’s children. Each generation that was born into the world was declaring, “There is still hope!”

That is why children were born during the great plagues that ravaged the world, during times of war, famines and other natural disasters. God was still giving couples an inheritance, a promise that life will go on. That gift was their children.

Scripture over and over declares the value and importance of children, but there can be no clearer message about the value of children than that given by Jesus himself. In Matthew 19:13-14 we read of people bringing their children to Jesus, seeking his blessing on them. The disciples, raised in a culture that said children were not valued, tried to send the children away. They saw the children as a nuisance.

How did Jesus respond? He rebuked the disciples and said, **“Let the children come to me.”** And then notice what else he said, **“Do not hinder them.”**

The number one duty of a parent is to bring the children to Jesus. The worst thing a person can do, Jesus says, is to hinder the children from coming to him. Jesus, meek and lowly, had these harsh words for those who harm our children:

**But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.** (Matthew 18:6)

We live in a day when many things hinder our children from coming to Jesus. From good things like sports to terrible things like child slavery and exploitation. Come judgement day there will be many people who will have to give an account of themselves before Jesus for hindering the children from coming to him.

I was tempted to insert here the names of all the founders of social media platforms as those hindering the children from coming to Jesus, but I was also reminded that there have been priests and pastors who have hindered people from coming to Jesus as well. We can add to that list teachers and professors, neighbours and friends, even parents and grandparents have all had their representatives of people who hinder the children from coming to Jesus.

God says children are an inheritance or gift from him to their parents – and to the world.

Can I tell you the worst days of the pandemic? It was early on, when we just discovered that there was a virus that was spreading through the world that could seriously affect the breathing of the victims. We were warned of respirators and breathing tubes for infected people. We knew little about how it was spread, if it could be resisted, etc, so we were all told to stay home if possible – work from home, do church from home, do school from home. Municipalities went out and put yellow ribbons around our play apparatus at the parks so children could not play there.

This meant that when you drove by a park (walking was not allowed then) it was silent and deserted. No children, no parents, no play. It was an eerie, sad scene.

Turn the clock forward to this month, and Lise and I were walking the waterfront, passing by the playground in Maffeo Sutton Park. The place was filled with children and their parents, laughing and screaming and playing – it was a delightful sight and sound.

May we never see children as a burden, or an accident. May we never take them for granted, or wish they were not there.

“Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world  
Red, and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight.  
Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

I suspect someone will say that is politically incorrect, but the message is worth repeating: Jesus loves children!

When a person introduces him or herself to someone they often find something that describes who they are, or defines them. My default is, “I am a pastor.” I am much more, but it helps people identify who I am and what I do. Lise might say she is a mother, a grandmother and a store clerk.

In Psalm 68:5 God introduces himself to us, and it is interesting to note how he defines himself. He could say, “I am the Almighty God!” or “I am the Creator.” There are so many ways God can reveal himself to us, but in Psalm 68:5 he introduces himself this way:

**“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”**

God defines himself as the father to the fatherless. God is the protector of orphans. God wants us to know him as the one who loves and cares for the children.

And we must do the same. Children need to be protected.

You may recall the stories we shared on Freedom Sunday, the week we remembered those still caught in human slavery and human trafficking. What we noted is that a growing number of victims are children. Younger and younger children are being dragged into the sex trade, often viewed by men and women through webcams as they are being sexually assaulted.

I saw a picture of dug out boats sitting abandoned in the ocean near Cebu, Philippines. This area once had a thriving fishing economy, and these boats would go out every day to catch fish and provide for the families. Fishermen would work long days and on the good days make up to P200. Sadly, these fishermen learned that if they bought a webcam and filmed their daughters they could make P2000 a day. They have abandoned their fishing boats.

Children need to be protected.

Note what else it says in verse 3: children are called the fruit of the womb and a reward from God.

That reminds us of what is written in Psalm 139:13-16:

**For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.**

**<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.**

**<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.**

**<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.**

If we are known by God in our mother's womb and he already has plans for our lives while we are growing there, we must conclude the unborn child is precious to God too.

Sadly, in our day, the unborn are treated as tissue, or referred to as a fetus as if that is something different from a child. Satan has made war on God's people since the Garden of Eden and continues that attack today on the unborn child. Satan knows every child bears the image of God, as Genesis 1:27 tells us, and Satan hates that.

So Satan has declared war on the children, trying to destroy them right from infancy or before. In Moses' day the baby boys were to be thrown into the Nile River and drown (or eaten by crocodiles). At Jesus' birth the male boys were slaughtered by Herod as he tried to eliminate the one born to be king of the Jews. Today thousands of babies die at the hands of doctors before they ever leave their mother's wombs.

Satan has declared war on children and God will not forget this evil. We side with God as we try to give hope to expecting mothers who are wrestling with this life and death question. We believe they can receive true support and accurate information through the local Crisis Pregnancy Center, so each month we send support to this ministry in our community.

Children are also to be provided for. James 1:27 tells us:

**<sup>27</sup> Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.**

Look after the orphans, the children, God says to his people. Yes, we look after them by bringing them to Jesus, but we also need to be sure they are fed and clothed and cared for. A sad reality of our times is that children in rich nations like Canada, in well off cities like Nanaimo, have children who come to school without eating breakfast or having a lunch. Fortunately many schools are providing this, and better still, Christian ministries are partnering with schools to see this happen.

But this is a problem globally. We are all haunted by the images of the children with distended bellies and toothpick thin limbs who are starving right now. Tonight Cheral will be sharing about

her mission trips to the Dominican Republic, and one of the things she did was to provide food for children and their families. A family food pack looks like this:

- a 4 lb bag of rice, 2lbs of pasta, 1 lb of beans, 1 package of corn meal, 1 can of tomato paste, 4 cans of sardines, 2 cups of oil, 1 bar of soap, and 4 maggi cubes (broth)

Can you guess how much that costs? Can you guess how long that is to last a family? Come tonight and Cheral will tell you...

Some of you sponsor children through World Vision, or Nazarene Compassionate ministries, or some other agency. That is a great way to make your faith come alive and do what God has called his church to do – look after the children.

The Psalmist says children are like **“arrows in the hands of a warrior” and “blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them.”**

I am not certain about this metaphor, but I do know that an arrow is not much good if it is warped and crooked. To be effective it must be straight.

The Psalm starts with these words: <sup>1</sup> **Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.**

The first thing a couple must do is build their home on a firm foundation of faith and trust in God. That then needs to be passed on to the children – **“Train up a child in the way he should go so that when he is old he will not depart from it.”** (Proverbs 22:6)

This is how the arrow will fly true. That arrow will be the pride of the mother and father, who stand at the gate and say, “See, this is my son,” or “this is my daughter.”

Yet it is not just the parents who are responsible for training up a child in the way he should go. It is the task of the whole church. Even if we hire someone to lead our children’s ministry that does not let you off the hook in caring for the children.

Last week you got prayer cards for the children – don’t forget to pray for them.

Most of us do not have children at home anymore – so why not adopt a child from the church and send notes of encouragement, chat with them at church, be to them an uncle or aunt, grandparent in the Lord.

This morning we have seen that children are a gift from God, and that we must bring them to Jesus, protect them and feed them. Children are a gift to their parents, true, but to all of us. May the way we treat them show them they are truly loved and valued by us.

God in love gave us family – Mom, Dad and children. Next week we will look at one more member of the family, but for today, thank God for the gift of children.