

Sin: A Dominion Ended, A Reign Rejected

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Romans

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Bible Text: Romans 6:6-14

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Gracious God and Father, thank you for the blessings that you have poured out upon us already today. Make us, we ask, by every blessing you give to us, hungry and thirsty for more that we may be lovers of your presence and your glory. We can never be satisfied until we see it and taste it and enjoy it afresh. We pray now as we turn to your Word that you will speak to us with grace and with power and by your Holy Spirit, the fulfillment of our Lord Jesus' prayer for us may wonderfully be evidenced among us: "Sanctify them in your truth. Your Word is truth." Therefore, work upon us, Spirit of God, by your Word. Make us, we pray, ready instruments in the hands of the master carpenter our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it for his sake. Amen.

Please be seated.

There are rare occasions, at least they are rare in my experience when during the course of a service there is such an impression made upon one's spirit and soul that one feels compelled to preach on something different from what has been announced. And feeling that compulsion earlier on in the service, those of you who were sitting in the gallery wondering why at points I was scribbling on a piece of paper, will now realize that what I was doing was earnestly praying that if the Lord wanted me to preach on something different tonight, he would at least give me an outline so that I would not preach without preparation all together.

And so I want to turn with you this evening to consider—and I am stealing this title from Duff James—the question: What kind of instrument are you? And I am thinking particularly this evening of what kind of instrument are you in relationship to young people, the young people in our church, the young people in your family, the young people in your neighborhood, the young people, perhaps in your wider family circle.

To help us to do that, I want you to turn with me to Paul's second letter to Timothy and to the third chapter and particularly in chapter three to verse 14.

In 2 Timothy the apostle Paul draws a series of contrasts for Timothy between others and himself. These emerge often enough in sentences that begin, "But..." in which he is drawing a contrast between the way in which the world thinks and the way in which

Timothy is to think or between the experience of the world and the experience of Timothy or between the lifestyle of the world and the lifestyle of Timothy. And verse 14 is one of these statements.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹

I want to make very simply four points to you this evening. They are impressed {?} rather suddenly, as it were, but really impressed upon my heart by our vacation Bible school this week, by the flow of this day, by the celebration of Ellen's 25 years of ministry, by the joy of seeing our children sing, but also by the burden that I imagine rests on every Christian minister's heart who is worthy of the name and that is a burden for the children.

Many of us who are in the church this evening either hope to have children, have children and wonder whether we should have had children, have an interest in children—shame on you if you don't—have grand children or great grand children. And there are four things that emerge from what the apostle Paul is saying to Timothy here that seem to me to be important watch words for us to have written upon our hearts. The first of them is this. And it is a very obvious thing from this text of Scripture. It is the value of children knowing the Scriptures from their infancy.

I am a living illustration of this, perhaps a poor one, but a real one. My parents, as many of you know, did not go to church. We did not have many books in our family home, but one book that had been kept by my mother was my grandmother's old Bible. I have never met my grandmother. This was my only physical contact and relationship with her and I think I probably learned to read at perhaps an unusually early age. My mother had little education, but she educated her boys almost from infancy.

And I still have remembrance of cold winter mornings in the days before central heating climbing into my parents' bed once they had risen for the day, finding a warm place that as left there by my parents and taking my grandmother's old Bible and searching for my two favorite Bible stories. They were not easy for me to find, the first because there was no book named after him, the second because although there was a book named after him, it was hundreds of pages through the Bible and I could never remember exactly where it was, but first was the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. The second was the story of Daniel in the book of Daniel.

The first that without me realizing it taught me from infancy that God is absolutely sovereign over the lives of his people, that he works everything together for good for those who trust him and that he is able to take the most adverse circumstances in life and channel them into the rivers that lead to his greater honor and glory and praise so that it is

¹ 2 Timothy 3:14-15.

said a couple of times in the story of Joseph, “You or others meant these things to harm me, but God meant them for good.”

And the story of Daniel—dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone, dare to have a purpose for him and dare to make him known—and his three companions willing to risk everything for the sake of the glory of God and trusting God that even if they should perish, then they would never yield to any other god.

And I, speaking for myself, look back now and think if I have made any progress in sensing in difficult seasons of my life that God is still sovereign. If I have been able to trust him even in those occasions like the psalm which we were reading when I was almost screaming at him and could see no happy ending in sight, it was because from infancy I was learning the sacred Scriptures that are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

It is a long time since there has been a coronation in the United Kingdom, 56 years to be exact, but one of the things that takes place in a British coronation—I hope to God it may take place in the next one if there is a next one—is that the monarch is given a copy of the holy Scriptures and told, “This is the most precious possession earth contains.”

And I want to challenge those of you who are parents, parents of infants, parents of youngsters, that if you hide the Scriptures from your children, it may be true that it were better that a millstone be hung round your neck and you be cast into the midst of the sea than that you should ever imagine that you are behaving like a Christian parent.

Some of you know the name of my friend Don Carson, New Testament scholar at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a widely published. I remember Don saying when his little girl was only a few years old he was sitting, teaching her a nursery rhyme. Mary had a little... and she would say, “Lamb.” Its fleece was white as snow. And then as they developed Mary had a little lamb. Its fleece was white as snow. When it dawned on him that he was devoting himself to hours of worldly catechizing and never teaching her to say:

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life.”²

That is sobering, isn't it? You think of all you pour into the education of your children. You think of the ways in which you seek to guard them from this world, but unless you are pouring the Scriptures into them from infancy, my dear friend, you are guilty of the greatest spiritual dereliction of duty you could ever have before the face of God, because there is nothing more precious for your children, for my grandchildren, than that from their infancy they should know the Scriptures that are able to make them wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

² John 3:16.

Second thing this text teaches us not only the value of knowing Scripture from infancy, but the vital importance of parental faithfulness under the most difficult circumstances.

The single greatest excuse you and I make for not teaching our children the Scriptures is in one form or another that there are difficult circumstances. It is difficult for us to find a time. It is difficult for us the way my husband works, the way my wife... it is difficult for us in a world like this. There is nobody there to help us. But, you see, the fascinating thing about Timothy, if you know his life story, is that he was reared in difficult circumstances. His grandmother and his mother were Jewish believers. His father was a Gentile and everything we know about Timothy suggests to us that his father appears to have stood in the way of his spiritual upbringing within the Jewish community. He had never been circumcised. And so in some ways it is difficult to imagine a more testing situation than for these two women in that kind of patriarchal society to be seeking to rear this little boy in godliness and for the glory of God and investing the Scriptures in his life.

And yet they remain faithful. Actually the wonderful thing that Paul says about them—he only uses this expression, if I remember rightly, once in all his writings—is “Timothy, you be blessed with this.” Actually he seems to have more conviction about Timothy’s mom and grandma than he does even about Timothy. He says, “I know that faith dwelt in them. And I believe it also dwells in you,” because under the most difficult circumstances they never made excuses and failed to fulfill their grandmotherly and motherly responsibility to teach this little boy the truth of the gospel.

Let me say to you those of you who are parents of these children, what a delight to see them, what a marvel it was this week to see our children so happy in this church, loving this church, loving the many teenagers who helped them loving the teachers who taught them, the staff who helped them in a multitude of different ways. I pray to God there was not one of these children who was sent here in order that the church should do something for these children that parents are first and foremost responsible for before the face of God. I sometimes wonder, my dear friends, if one of the questions, one of the first questions God will ask me at the day of judgment as he assesses my life is not going to be: How well did you preach? But what kind of father were you? How faithful were you? Yes, in difficult circumstances, but how faithful were you to the charges I gave to you?

That is your first ministry, isn’t it? Not to be using your gifts here and there in the church serving here and there in the church. Thank God that you do, but if you do that at the expense of your children’s spiritual well being, you need to be absolutely convinced in your soul that you can do no other than leave husband or wife or children for the sake of the gospel. Are you doing it simply for material well being? People sometimes say to me, “But we have got ... but my job is so busy I have no time to teach the children.”

Then you would be better to take a pay cut and another job, I tell you, than as a husband and wife to be derelict of this duty. And what an example these women are to us of faith living in their hearts. And, you see, this is the thing, isn’t it? I think this is part of the

explanation for some of the difficulties Timothy had. He obviously was far from being a type A personality. He was certainly not an all American boy. He had stomach problems as a youngster.

But, you see, they had been faithful.

Something I think we learn from this passage, the value of knowing Scripture from infancy, the importance of parental faithfulness in difficult circumstances. Here is the third thing that should encourage us greatly: the possibility of great usefulness for the most ordinary of Christians.

I remember once being at what at that time was by far the largest gathering of Christians that ever took place on an annual basis in the United Kingdom. I happened to be a speaker. It was more than 30 years ago. I was sitting on the platform and the chairman said, "Now," he said, "I would like all those parents who are in this vast assembly who have committed in prayer their children to go anywhere for Jesus Christ, particularly if that be overseas, to stand in their place. And a whole army stood up. And I remember the sense of awe that came upon my still relatively young spirit at the thought that I was sitting there and would soon be speaking to parents whose shoes I was scarcely worthy to clean. Because, you see, they were not only committed to the gospel for themselves. And most of them were by far the most ordinary people in the world. But they were committed that the gospel would consume their children. And that was their highest ambition. I am sure they were working hard for their education and working hard for their future. And every parent surely worth their salt has this kind of deep instinct that their children will have a better start in life or a better opportunity or whatever than they have had. That is why we are parents. It is not children to store up for their parents, but parents who store up for their children, the Scripture says.

But would you have stood up? Would you stand up if I said right now I want every parent in this room, every grandparent in this room who is utterly committed to this principle that above all other things, my children and my grand children will love Christ, serve Christ, go for Christ anywhere, any time, any cost?

Now, of course, they may remain in Columbia all their lives. But, you see, if I feel something in my heart that says my children for me and for here, then I am in danger of adding to the church's disobedience and failure to the Great Commission to go the ends of the earth to bring the gospel to all men and women.

My dear friends, this is what we need to have at the forefront of our understanding. God is not going to ask our children about their accomplishments in this world. God is going to ask our children how faithful they were to his beloved Son the Lord Jesus Christ. And our chief responsibility, just as Matt Lucas reminded us this morning in a sense, our chief responsibility for our children is to prepare them for everlasting life. Some of us remember as we look back what seems a short time how people said to us, "Enjoy them while you have got them. They will be gone before you know it." And they are. And the question is: What are they going to take when they are gone? Are they going to take the

atmosphere that they have breathed in from their dad? The one thing I can say about my dad. Oh, I would to God my children might be able to say this. The one thing about my dad for all his failures, for all his eccentricities, for all that he has so often been far away from us, the one thing I can be sure of my dad is that he is utterly committed to Jesus Christ. Isn't that your aspiration, too, no matter what you do?

And, you see, it is from that kind of fruit that God produces at times the most extraordinary and unexpected heroes of the faith. If I were to list for you 50 great names in church history I will bet that among us except for those who have high levels of theological education and have studied these things, most of us wouldn't be able to name either of their parents.

Was it a few Sundays ago I asked you about the names of Moses' parents? They are in the Bible. Moses and most Christians have no idea who Moses' parents were. And he had one of the shrewdest, godly, scheming mothers in all the Bible. You see, now why did Moses...?

You see, it took a long time. Never forget this. There are men in the Bible for whom it took a long time before the parental devotion bore fruit. And that was the case with Moses. But, boy, did it bear fruit.

Think of Bishop Ambrose of Milan coming to the weeping Monica just despairing over her boy, Augustine, and saying, "My dear, the son of these tears shall not perish." He becomes one of the most significant people in all history. And I guess most people who know the name Augustine have no idea who his mom was.

Isn't this a wonderful thing? Isn't this encouragement in the days when it is just a hard slog to keep going, when you have got to mortify your own flesh in order to feed your children both physically and spiritually? But, oh, the blessing that can result from it.

And the fourth thing is this. The value of knowing Scripture from infancy, the importance of parental faithfulness, the possibility of great usefulness for the most obscure Christian parents. And, fourthly, the wonder of what our children can become despite all the obstacles.

Now you might not get that from 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy, Paul's last letter is a letter full of encouragement to him to stand fast and to play the man. But you do get it somewhere else in the New Testament. If you are anything like me and you have this habit as you get near to the end of a book, you just flick through the end of the book and get on to the meaty stuff in the next book. And there is a great temptation to do that also in connection with Bible books and perhaps especially in the New Testament with the book of Hebrews, because it is jolly hard work understanding the book of Hebrews. But if you are exhausted before you reach the last few verses of Hebrews, you will miss one of the jewels of the New Testament. Listen to this, Hebrews chapter 13, verse 23. There are only 25 verses in chapter 13. So this is the third last verse and the one that you are just about to read when you realize the next book is James and you love James because it is

such a practical book. And you don't notice these words.

“You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.”³

Now somebody tell me what that means. It means this timid sort, brought up largely in difficult circumstances by two believing women became a young man so committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ that he was prepared to go to prison for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

Now that is the kind of children I want, children who when they grow up will so love the Lord Jesus Christ even if it means going to prison. Mark these words. In many places in the western world that may not be so far away.

So what are you going to do, Christian parent? Are you going to give yourself in a fresh way to the Savior Jesus Christ? It is never too late. Do not let Satan say to you it is too late. It is never too late to come to him and say to him, “Lord Jesus, make me such a parent. Grant that I may see, by your Spirit, such glorious fruit.”

Well, this is the seed. The terrible thing about being a preacher, my friends, is this, that according to Jesus' statistics, every single sermon you preach will be stolen by the time people are out the front door. But may this fall on good soil and bring forth fruit 30 fold, 60 fold, 100 fold for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, minister to us we pray through this Word that calls us by your Spirit to search powerful accountability as Christian parents. Grant that it may find a real lodging place, we pray, in our hearts. Quicken within us fresh aspirations that will give us strength over the long haul to teach our beloved children your Word, to model it before them and to point them to Jesus Christ by the very way in which we love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And, oh, we pray that from among our youngsters, even those who were singing for us tonight there may come a band of soldiers of Jesus Christ who count this world as lost by comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of their Savior. Oh, bring this to pass is our prayer and we ask it for Jesus our Savior's sake. Amen.

³ Hebrews 13:23.